

GLORIA AT BOARDING SCHOOL



LILIAN GARIS

Book 1

Ann brouder
300 Burke St
Easton

From
Grandpa
Stryker
Grandma Stryke



GLORIA AND TRIXY EXAMINED THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE,
Gloria at Boarding School.

Frontispiece—(Page 38)

GLORIA AT BOARDING SCHOOL

By
LILIAN GARIS

AUTHOR OF "GLORIA: A GIRL AND
HER DAD," ETC.

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**GLORIA
AT BOARDING SCHOOL**

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CHAPTER I

MIXED BAGGAGE

THE dark haired girl, sitting on the cretonne couch, chuckled.

"So this is boarding school!"

No one heard her, the little clock on the corner shelf ticked away and never "let on," for new girls coming to that room were no novelty to the clock. They came and went yearly, sometimes oftener, and what difference did it make that this one chuckled? Those who sighed, or even those who wept, always got over it in time. No doubt the dark haired girl would get over her rather cynical defiance of Miss Alton's rules for lady-like deportment. Also, she might in time learn to sit on a chair properly.

Gloria Doane really felt defiant. Boarding

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school always represented restrictions to her inexperienced reasoning, and restrictions were never a part of her chosen schedule. A sense of freedom was necessary to her happiness.

At her Barbend home she scarcely respected the wildest coast storm, and often thought it a lark to help life guards shoot out their boats or rig up a buoy. But last year Gloria was "due" to go to this exclusive school and she had not done so. In fact, circumstances wove such a net about her that the meshes represented a most unusual story, told in the first volume of this series called, "Gloria: A Girl and Her Dad." But now the net was flattened out, stretched to dry on regulation lines, and Gloria had emerged like a fairy mermaid, changed back to an earth maiden, and was doing such ordinary things as going to boarding school.

All this she pondered as voices roused her and a step near her door threatened invasion.

"Trix!" she called lightly. The step halted.

"Did you get your trunk? It's downstairs and you will want to change your dress before dinner, or maybe it's supper," surmised Trixy Travers, the girl from Sandford, who decided to come to Altmount because Gloria begged her to

do so. Trixy was quite as fond of freedom as was Gloria, so, ultimately, they both decided "it wouldn't kill them to try it for a year." And there they were, ready to put the test to their resolve.

"Trunks," murmured Gloria, indifferently. "I saw one that looked like mine——"

"In the first hall? Get that bean pole they call Sam, to lug it up for you before the others come in. Then we can dress in our prettiest and flabbergast the crowd." A pulled face, quite unlike Trixy's usual countenance, put a period to this threat.

"Brilliant idea. I'll go straight for the bean pole. Just hook up that gorgeous drapery and our rooms will constitute a suite. So glad we are together. If you were down the hall I'd surely sit on your door mat like a faithful poodle. I just couldn't risk trying out this exciting life without the protection and guidance of your wisdom. I noticed Miss Alton herself paused in a speech as you towered over her.

"Glo, get your duds; you'll feel better when you are out of those dusty things," interrupted Trixy. "I'll go down to that cute little room where Miss Alton holds court, and see about a

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telephone to mother. She will want to know we got here safely."

The next item of note was the entrance of the bean pole, Sam, bearing a shiny new trunk.

"Just here," directed Gloria. "I suppose I can keep it in my room——"

"With a cover. Miss Alton she always likes pretty covers over trunks." Sam shifted the little table to give more space. "There, I guess that'll be all right——"

"Oh, yes; thanks." A half dollar was pressed into his convenient hand, and Gloria did not hide her impatience to be rid of the voluble Sam. He went. Girls were calling for him and there might be more tips.

Quickly Gloria fell to her trunk task but it did not readily give in to her key.

"Queer, but I suppose it's stiff, being new," she reasoned.

The rose colored dress, that which Jane insisted was most becoming to Gloria's dark hair and dark eyes, would be found in the top tray of the new trunk, and this was to be the "irresistible gown" Trixy suggested as a flabbergaster for the first evening's appearance.

"There!" exclaimed Gloria, as a spring of the

lock indicated surrender. "Now I've got it."

But raising the cover did not disclose the expected rose voile dress.

"Of all things!" gasped Gloria. "Whatever is—this?"

She was staring at a mass of glittering beads, or spangles, that seemed to fill the trunk tray. Just a hint of some material very green showed beneath the glistening surface, but whatever the article might be, it never had belonged to the girl looking at it.

She picked up an end of the material and found it heavy with spangles. Then she noticed an envelope pinned to an edge. Scrutinizing this she found the word "Precious" written across it, also "with care," was plainly inscribed upon the little square. Realizing now that the trunk was not hers, Gloria attempted to replace the glittering stuff, but as she did so something red and sparkling fell from the envelope into her hand.

"Gems!" she exclaimed, gazing spellbound at the deep red glow that seemed to absorb all the light about it. The stone was about the size of a small bean and was cut in facets.

Frightened lest she be found in possession of

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another's valuables, Gloria quickly dropped the end of the spangled goods back into the trunk tray, then slipped the big, red gem into the envelope through the corner hole it had cut its way out of. She had forgotten all about the rose colored costume, and even that Trixy was due back to dress for the first meeting with the girls of Altmount.

"How ever could I have mistaken that trunk?" Gloria worried. "Of course, it's exactly like mine, but where's the tag?"

With the lid closed and the lock snapped back she looked closer but found no tag to identify the strange piece of baggage.

Then, shuffling in the hall and Sam's characteristic groaning indicated the coming of more baggage, and quickly as the door was opened Gloria welcomed her own special new trunk, which had been purchased amid much discussion, for Jane, the faithful, was insistent that a new trunk be at once beautiful and useful, a combination seemingly realized in the black enamelled article, so easily mistaken for another. The "popular trunk for young ladies" was, apparently, very popular at Altmount.

"Made a mistake," wheezed Sam. "T'other

girl had yourn. Jest a mite more work, but that's all right," hinted the hopeful handy man.

"I'm in such a hurry," retorted Gloria meaningly.

"Oh, yes, of course. But 't warn't my fault exactly."

"That's perfectly all right. See, here's my name on this trunk. I hadn't noticed the other."

"They're all the same to me," chuckled Sam, shuffling off without further reward.

When Trixy returned, Gloria was already aglow in her rose colored gown.

"Lovely!" pronounced the admiring Trixy. "If we don't make an impression to-night it won't be the fault of clothes. Just look at this. Isn't it stunning?"

"Perfectly. Trix, you have such a modish way about you——"

"Oh, I don't know. You are no dowdy yourself. You always look to me like Molly Dawn, or Betty Bangle, or some other quaint character, bound to smile and look darling." An affectionate little squeeze illustrated this compliment, and presently both girls were being introduced to their fellow students. Gloria in rose color that heightened her sparkling dark beauty, and Trixy

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in French blue that beckoned the glints of her eyes.

It was a small school and boasted of the fact. Also, that its clientele would stand the "Social test," whatever that uncertain measure is supposed to be, was conspicuously stated in the prospectus.

Gloria was secretly happy to be sponsored by the impressive Trixy. As a matter of fact, no one could doubt the latter's standing. She was tall, a mellow blonde, the type softened with a tawny brown glow, and her mannerisms! It must have taken generations, thought Gloria humbly, to develop that smooth, irresistible ease and languid indifference toward irritating trifles.

But as a type Gloria, herself, was decidedly more pronounced. She was dark, with eyes that seemed to shoot sparks, with one dimple that always apologized for any pout the rather boyish mouth might affect, and withal Gloria had an air of independence sometimes mistaken for defiance.

As various as the characters they represented were the forms of greetings offered the new girls by those familiar with Altmount. Some

"gushed," impulsively generous in their squeezing handshakes and ebullient chatter, others were "stand off," formal and "frozen," as Gloria secretly classed the most conservative.

Pat Halliday explained her name as coming from the same Greek word Harriet was taken from.

"Only Patricia is so much nicer and Pat is perfectly jolly," declared the Grecian descendant. "I should abhor Harriet; though Harry isn't so bad."

Gloria quickly found interest in Pat. She was almost red headed and almost blue eyed, losing out by a mere shade in each instance. She talked a lot and laughed a lot, but plainly was no poser. Taking a place beside Gloria at table, Pat kept up a running fire of talk that saved the new girl from any possible self consciousness. At another table Trixy was trying to be pleasant with a girl of very different personality. She (the other girl) raised her eyebrows instead of uttering replies, she shrugged her shoulders haughtily and seemed insipidly affected.

"The girl without a smile," Gloria was promptly dubbing the ashen blonde. Trixy, sitting near enough, was flashing secret messages

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back to Gloria agreeing with the above. She was not having a very good time with the smileless girl, that was obvious.

Miss Alton sat at the head of the table, radiating good will. It was so important that her girls all become acquainted auspiciously. Although a small school, Altmount claimed the distinction of "finishing," so that a sprinkling of high school graduates, and a few who failed to win the honor, were to be found among those present.

Both Trixy and Gloria were covertly taking notice of as many girls as politeness afforded glances at. There was, of course, a bevy of "Gabbies" who scarcely paused to swallow, also, like the girl without a smile, there were those who held off, looked important and posed for impressions. This might have been their honest prerogative, but somehow it seemed to natural, naïve Gloria, a bit affected.

"I do hope you'll like it," bubbled Pat. "We need a few good sports and I'm sure you're one. There's room for more fun here if we only have the workers."

"I like fun," admitted Gloria. "And yes, I guess I am used to it." Her brown eyes sent out a sparkling guarantee.

After tea the girls paired off and strolled about the grounds. Pat "grabbed" Gloria, and both being of the younger set their romping went unscrutinized. Trixy, the imperturbable, seemed determined to provoke something like a smile from the reserved Mary Mears, but her good natured and tactful attempts were far from being successful. Mary Mears was wise, any one could see that. Her experience stood out like a wall, neither to be climbed over nor broken through. She was pretty but her skin betrayed traces of the applied arts, while her really wonderful violet eyes worked like magnetoes. All this attracted Trixy. Any one so totally different offered her a working problem, something to find out, to analyze and, mayhap, to conquer.

The September evening was quickening into shadows when the students turned back to the broad verandahs and cozy porch corners.

"Hear that?" Pat asked Gloria. "That's Jack Corday. She never stops talking and never says a sensible thing. Flashy," criticised the jolly one. "Just notice her get up. But she's a dear."

It was impossible not to notice it. The girl called Jack (Gloria later heard Miss Alton give

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her Jacquinot) did talk incessantly in a voice that intruded everywhere, and as she promenaded up and down, dragging along a timid new girl called Ethel, the "get up" Pat mentioned was equally intrusive. A glaring, tiger-lily red baronet skirt, a black silk sweater and colorful bobbed hair. Dangling from her neck was a string of varied colored wooden beads with which she toyed constantly.

The string of beads reminded Gloria of the mistaken trunk.

"Is she a—stranger?" she asked Pat.

"Somewhat. That is, she comes and goes. I wonder Miss Alton admits her. Jack never settles down to anything serious. She makes me think of a big butterfly."

"The black and yellow kind."

"Uh-huh!" conceded Pat.

A call to the opening chorus within the assembly room was reluctantly obeyed. "Hail, Altmount," composed by a brilliant but unpopular girl of the graduating class two years back, was murmured, mumbled and otherwise abused. The faculty chimed in with more enthusiasm than voice, and eventually the wail ended.

"Oh, let's sing the regular college songs," proposed Jack, slamming a yellow book on the piano rack in front of demure Miss Taylor.

But the majority of the girls, the great majority, deserted, and left few with Jack and timid Ethel to "try" the regular college songs. No one seemed to have a voice or there was something seriously wrong with the tunes, for one after the other they were "tried," until the long suffering Miss Taylor proposed a truce.

"Jack doesn't seem to be very popular," ventured Gloria to the giggling Pat, when the trials were all over.

"She isn't exactly, but somehow she seems to love opposition. I don't know her well. This is only my second term, I came last Spring, but Jack Corday could climb a flag pole if she wanted to. She's a wiz at gym, but books! She has about as much use for a book as an Indian has," declared the accommodating Pat. "Just the same I love her."

"My friend Trixy seems to have struck an iceberg," further commented Gloria. The "iceberg" being the ashen blonde called Mary Mears.

"Oh, I don't know her, she's new," replied Pat.

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"But even icebergs melt finally. She's rather pretty, isn't she?"

"Rather," agreed Gloria just as Trixy joined her group on the corner bench.

CHAPTER II

TELLING TRIXY

By the merest chance Gloria did not tell Trixy of the trunk incident. Not that she had any intention of keeping from her friend such an interesting possibility, but because—well, each time she thought of it something intervened, until after days and then more than a week passed, the tale seemed too stale to be revived.

Pat proved delightfully amusing, Mary Mears was mysterious and Jacquinot Corday so spectacular that the first month at Altmount went by without a dull day or even a lonely night for Gloria.

Trix Travers was at the finishing school chiefly because Gloria Doane had inveigled her into coming. As the fashionable and popular girl at Sandford, where her father was an important manufacturer, Trixy had enjoyed good times unlimited, but as Gloria was due to attend

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boarding school and she reasonably decided there would be much more security from either boredom or loneliness with Trixy to lean upon.

Few letters and fewer home visits were advised by this, as by most boarding schools, during the students' first month or two, so that those away from home for the first time might more promptly become inured to their new surroundings; so it happened Gloria had only received and written two letters from and to Jane. Now, Jane, the faithful, had for years stood sponsor for Gloria, whose mother had died when Gloria was but a tiny child. Jane kept house at Barbend, the original home of Gloria and her father, and when the young girl came into Sandford to remain with her Aunt Harriet while her father took a foreign commission from his firm, Jane Morgan went to visit her own sister, she who had so many children that the snapshot pictures frequently sent Jane were apt to be misleading in personalities. They all looked alike and seemed too many for the camera.

Mr. Doane, Gloria's father, had returned from abroad during the previous late winter, only to enter upon a longer trip to the Philippines. His homecoming the Christmas before added the

final happy chapter to Gloria's adventure as a real estate expert, for with Mr. Doane had come the young engineer, Sherry Graves, whose venture in Echo Park proved disastrous, ruined his hopes, and all but sent him adrift in despair. Then, the natural enemy of the pretty little park, an underground river vein, was accidentally discovered by Gloria and promptly turned into a harmless course by Sherry and his friend, Ben Hardy.

The result was a boomerang credited to Gloria. These home conditions explain the dearth of letters coming or not coming to her just now, at the new boarding school.

There had been one, however, from her father, remailed at San Francisco, and also a characteristic scrawl from Tommy Whitely, her childhood friend at Barbend. Aunt Harriet had written, of course, telling of her daughter Hazel's wonderful progress in voice culture. Hazel had spent the previous year at Altmount, while Gloria submitted meekly to a confused, if not unjust plan, of giving this preference to the "artistic cousin."

Trix's letters were not quite so restricted, as she was in the finishing class. Among the most

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interesting was one from Sherry, who told of a "perfectly thrilling plan" for the further development of Gloria's Echo Park.

"You'll be rich, Glo, if Sherry keeps on. He writes of perfectly fairy like castles on your property."

"I don't want to be rich," replied Gloria evenly, "but I am glad that the poor mason and his family, the one who at first lost so much in the work there, are finally made happy and comfortable. Of course it was Ben's genius in engineering that did it all."

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Trixy. "It was rather queer the genius couldn't find that sneaky little river vein, that almost turned the pretty park on end. A mere girl, one Gloria Doane, managed that."

The two chums were spending the evening in their connecting rooms, discussing the home news. A letter to Trixy received on the late mail added zest to the discussion.

"Really, how do you like it here, Glo?" asked Trixy. She shot her feet out in front of her with the question, and kicked over a useless little stool in the process.

"Much better than I expected," admitted

Gloria. "Pat's always so jolly, then there's the haughty Mary Mears and the breezy Jack Cor-day for variety. Who could complain with all that?"

"Isn't Pat a lark? She just bubbles over everything and, as the boys say, gets away with it," replied Trixy. "But Mary really seems mysterious. I haven't been able to pry open the reserve crust. Yet, it doesn't seem at all natural to me."

"How about Jack?"

"The human pinwheel?"

"Pat says she is just about that."

"How?"

"A wiz at gym."

"Oh. Perhaps that accounts for her circus clothes."

"That reminds me, Trixy. I have been wanting to tell you so often——"

"Whew! Sounds guilty!"

"Not quite. But I really have wanted to tell you," floundered Gloria.

"Go ahead!"

"Then please listen."

"All ears."

Gloria tossed her head up defiantly. "One

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doesn't peg confidences at another's head," she pouted.

"Now, **Glo**, darling," cooed Trixy. "I does truly want to hear. Be a lamb and tell me."

Settling anew Gloria began:

"It's about trunks——"

"The portable, or athletic?"

"Now, Trixy!"

"But you do offer such bait for little fishes, pet, I just can't resist. I had trunks on my mind. The basket ball squad is considering something like them to pad out for rough play. But tell me, like a pet, what about your trunks?"

Trixie was irresistible. She wore the simple uniform of Altmount, the white shirtwaist and dark blue skirt used by the older girls, and its very simplicity set off more effectively her almost faultless personality. With an arm around the pouting Gloria, and lips in close proximity to a left ear, she again cooed her request for the secret.

Gloria's own lips lost their pout in a real surrendering smile, as she again attempted the tale.

"You see, that afternoon we came here there was so much confusion with baggage and so little time to dress——"

"And I warned you to fix up your finest."

"Exactly. Well, I tackled, what I took for my own new, shiny, black trunk, and found it too hard to unlock——"

"You called in the Bean Pole?"

"No. I struggled and conquered."

"Being you, you would."

"But when the lid finally decided to come up I found the belongings within not mine."

"Oh!" Trixy fell back a little and waited. Her exclamation was merely a polite acquiescence.

"Yes," continued Gloria, "the top of that trunk was covered if not filled with the queerest materials——"

"Oh! Whoozy-boozy! How mysterious! No skeletons?"

"Quite the opposite. A perfect glitter of gems——"

"Gloria Doane! And you have never told me we are harboring a pirate's daughter! Gems!"

"At least they looked like gems," went on the imperturbable Gloria. "Of course, I was all a-flutter and couldn't possibly inspect" (this with an air of real importance), "but I did manage to lay hold of an envelope."

"Glo! An envelope! With the pirate's address!"

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"Are they so careless as to leave addresses lying around loose like that? I thought they always used secret codes, made with pieces of string and rusty nails scattered in a long, long trail."

"Of course. How stupid of me. The envelope was full of rusty spikes."

Gloria twisted herself away with an air of finality until Trixy seized her. "Go ahead," she implored. "Go right straight ahead. This suspense is killing me. What was the glitter and what did the envelope say about the secret?"

"You know, Trix, I really was a bit scary. You were off gallivanting, and there I was all alone, with a strange trunk full of mysteriously glittering stuff. How did I know who might rush in and accuse me."

"Exactly! How did you know?" Trixy's banter now toned down to real interest. "The envelope, dear, what about that?"

"I had begun to realize I was trespassing, you know, and I just glanced at the envelope. On it was written the word 'Precious.' "

"Precious?"

"Yes. That and 'With Care.' But just as I attempted to put it back, I had taken it in my

hands of course, just as I went to put it back, a stone fell out."

"A gem?"

"It looked like one. A great red garnet or some sort of stone that seemed bursting with imprisoned glow."

"How perfectly wonderful!"

"Yes, honestly, Trix, it made me creepy. I got the fire-drop back in that envelope as quickly as I could, you can believe me. It made me think of an animal's eye, not a serpent's eye, they're green, but the eye of some sneaky little beast——"

"Beastie, Glo. You must call the small ones, beasties. But you are so, so graphic, you give me the shivers. Are you sure there are none of the beasties crawling around here now?"

"But I haven't told you about the spangly things," persisted Gloria, ignoring the frivolity. "They didn't seem to be on gowns. I couldn't, in the moment, make out what the article was. All I saw was glitter and sparkle."

"What color was it?"

"Many colors, I thought; but red shone through. You see, Sam came back just as I got the trunk shut. I wouldn't want to have been

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discovered snooping into another girl's stuff," declared Gloria.

"But whom could it have belonged to?"

"That's an interesting question, don't you think so? Just imagine what sort of girl would bring that here?"

"Exactly. But you watch little Trixy solve the mystery of the trunk full of gems!"

"I'm quite willing to," agreed Gloria, with a weary little sigh.

CHAPTER III

MEET MAGGIE

Two days later Maggie, who swept rooms and talked a lot, also counted hairpins, picked from the dust, and bewailed her own constant loss insinuating a present need, this Maggie, with a season's new broom and last year's dust pan, a basket of dusters, brushes, and in the bottom such articles as the girls donated on her rounds, well, anyhow, she came in to clear up Gloria's room.

"This bein' a double," analyzed Maggie, "I'll have to have it free."

"Free?" repeated Gloria.

"Yes. I could do it whilst you're in class, but I like to keep these new curtains well shook and that makes considerable flare around. Ain't they pretty?"

"Very."

"Then, jest pick up your precious stuff, I allus.

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calls the little things precious, and whilst you're out this afternoon—you will be out?"

"Yes."

"Whilst you're both out I clean. I allus thinks this is the prettiest 'sweet' in the house. Ain't it now?"

Gloria was hurrying before the wavering broom. Her "precious stuff" would be easily gathered and then she might escape from Maggie's gossip.

"About the hairpins now, where shall I put them?"

"Oh, keep them," smiled Gloria. "You see I never use any."

"That's so. Ain't I stupid. Since the bobbs came in it seems to me that hairpins is harder to get. Stores even, don't allus carry them." She retrieved a brown lock of hair that was trying to get down her back. "And my hair's such a nuisance. You don't wear nets either?"

"No."

"What a comfort. I'll put any baby pins and such right—where should I put them?"

"You won't be apt to find any," said Gloria, wondering what next Maggie might hint for.

"Well, I'm honest as the sun, Miss Alton says,

and what's on the floor goes on the bureau, every time." The basket and contents were inadvertently tipped over just then, and Maggie dove after the things that flew.

"There, ain't that a pretty waist? Miss Davis, she's the rich girl that has number ten, she's been here, land know how long, and I asked her yesterday if this was her last year and she didn't know. She's the loveliest girl, and so good-natured. I jest said I loved blue and she gave me the waist. I think it'll fit me." It was held aloft midway between chin and waistline, and Gloria said it looked all right.

Then she escaped.

And Maggie ostensibly swept the room, aired the pillows and shook the curtains. Trixy's room had an unusually large mirror hung from the wall, between two windows, and whether Maggie posed in borrowed finery or merely spent time in profitable meditation, is not relevant, for it was her own time as well as her own work, and Maggie managed to finish on schedule in spite of all interruptions.

When Gloria ventured back, after first peeking in from behind Trixy's curtains, she found things nicely slicked up.

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"Good old Maggie!" she thought. "I am sure she is quite as honest as she claims to be."

Addressing the well dusted bureau with a few more appropriate remarks, Gloria's gaze fell upon a strange object.

"What's this?" she asked aloud, for a small, glittering, bead-like stone instantly recalled the other. That one she had replaced in the torn envelope and put back in the strange trunk.

"A gem! A real garnet—or ruby—"

There was no question as to where it came from. Maggie had found it upon the floor, perhaps under the edge of the rug, and it must have fallen there from the envelope marked "Precious."

Gloria turned the stone over on her open palm. She knew little of precious stones, but she easily guessed that this was valuable.

"What shall I do with it?"

The thought that its owner would resent her knowledge of so secret an affair as the opening of a trunk, and the handling of its contents, was disturbing.

"Oh, bother!" complained Gloria. "What am I going to do about a thing like this, anyway?"

Trix's return was welcomed. And the discovered treasure promptly and adequately discussed.

"Suppose you keep it for a day or two——"

"No indeed," objected Gloria. "I have no wish to be throttled by the pirate's daughter."

"But it has been here for days——"

"That's why my head ached. This thing is charmed. Maybe a drop of some one's blood is sealed within the crystal," she flippantly suggested, turning the stone over and over, smiling fondly upon it and otherwise showing neither fear nor distaste for the frozen "drop of blood."

"I think it's a garnet," suggested Trix.

"Why should a boarding school girl want to lug such stuff around with her?"

"Why?" repeated Trix. "No custom officers to dodge."

"But in that trunk! And not even in a strong little box," argued Gloria.

"Some girls are careless. Also some grown ups. You know how very often real diamonds are hidden in old shoes and retrieved by honest cobblers, who become socialists after receiving the dollar ninety-eight cents reward," philosophised Trix. "Still, the girl who dropped them

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in her trunk must have been in an awful hurry."

"But why hasn't the owner advertised on the bulletin?" reasoned Gloria further.

"It is queer. Do you suppose Maggie knows——"

"That's so. I'll have to give Maggie something."

"Better thank her for finding your bead and give her ten cents," suggested the practical Trixy. "Otherwise, you may not be able to make a satisfactory accounting. Don't let her suspect what you suspect."

"A good idea. Listen! I hear her plaintive voice. Let's have done with it. Lend me exactly a dime."

"First, put the pirate's treasure in my jewel box. I'll be responsible for it and defy its evil eye—until you find the owner," agreed Trixy affably. Gloria borrowed the dime and thrust it upon the inarticulate Maggie. Money, it seemed, always surprised her into speechlessness.

"And now," decided Gloria, "I'll take the 'evil eye' down to the office——"

"Suppose it is a real secret, that the owner has some worthy motive in hiding it."

"Trix, you're a regular Portia. I do hope

you decide to study law. How would you suggest I get rid of the thing?"

"Post a notice, asking the loser of a small red stone to call at this room. We might excite less comment if we said 'trinket' instead of 'stone.' "

"And have every one who lost a hair net, a hairpin, or a barrett, calling," objected Gloria.

"That's so. But Maggie may see the notice and recognize her find."

"She won't have time to read bulletins today."

"No, I suppose not. Then just write a simple, unsuspicious notice, and say small red stone."

"Peachy!" exclaimed Gloria. "Then we'll have a chance to learn who really is the Pirate's Daughter."

Trixy wrapped the vagrant stone in a piece of tissue paper and then in a piece of tin foil from her film package, meanwhile moaning weird incantations. Then, after waving it in the air to break the spell, she very gingerly dropped the paper and tin foil packet into her little jewel case.

Gloria wrote the "found notice" with directions for reclaiming the "red stone" and was off instantly to post it upon the bulletin.

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"Thir-rill-ling!" she chanted. "Suppose it's Pat's!"

"Or Jack's?"

"Or just a red bead from the ten cent store?"

"I'd like to get a couple of dozen," declared Trixy.

"Well, here's for the bill board. Better watch out. Some one might kidnap me."

With a parting laugh Gloria raced off and it seemed she was back, out of breath, and out of speech, before Trixy could close the drawer on the jewel box.

"I feel like a thief!" she gasped. "Isn't it horrid to find a thing so long after?"

"As if you had been waiting for an offered reward?" laughed Trixy. "We aren't likely to be suspected of anything like that, so don't worry, lamb. I'm just all a-quiver of anticipation."

But after lunch the little note was missing from its hook on the bulletin and in its place was found a message sealed and addressed to "Finder." The girls read it in their own room behind closed doors.

The note read: "Please drop into old brass vase on teakwood stand in alcove of west sitting room." That was all.

"Oh," moaned Gloria, in disappointment.
"Not even to say drop what."

"How perfectly mean," growled Trixy.

"Suppose we don't. We might say that it
'must be called for,'" suggested Gloria.

"But then," mused Trixy, "there may be a real
reason."

"Again; noble Portia, I salute thee," mocked
Gloria. "In other words, just as you say. But
I'd hate to be fooled again. That old trunk
seems destined to add to my misery. Not that
there's much more room for addition" (another
groan and wild, agonizing rolling of eyes), "but
I suppose we may as well drop the 'jool' in the
vaase."

"May as better," amended Trixy.

"You do it and I'll watch."

"Foxy. Suppose some of the eagles see you.
How do we know this isn't sort of an initiation?"

"We don't. I never thought of that, little
Brightness. As you say, we had better follow
directions, and not be compelled to wear our waists
inside out, or parade two different colored stock-
ings. Here, give me the pesky thing. I'll hie
me to the dump with it and so cast off the spell."

Almost as quickly as she had posted the letter

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did she "dump the thing and beat it," in her own inelegant language. She now stood before Trixy making foolish faces.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed, brushing her hands to shed the imagined pollution, "now it's all over. And we've lost trace of the Pirate's Daughter."

"There's no telling," presaged Trixy. "She may remember you in her will."

"And again she may not. Well, may all our ill health go with it, as dear old Jane would say. Trixy, when do we go out to see our anxious friends?" (This meant the home folks.)

"I dunno. But let's stick it out for a while and then, when we do take a little trip to Sandford, we won't feel like a couple of hookey kids. Not that I wouldn't love to see my mommer right now——"

"And my—da-da!"

Reflection brought gloom. Forgotten was the frozen blood stone and the old brass vase. Two girls sat glum, with heads down and knees up, with chins pushed up into pouting lips, and naught but an occasional groan or grunt giving sign of articulation.

"I dunno," said Gloria finally. "But there's Pat! Mum's the word, dearie, about the pirate's

watch guard or collar button or—paper weight.
Don't let us whisper——”

“Not a whisper,” agreed Trixy.

So Pat never knew what she had missed, and didn't even guess that she had missed anything.

CHAPTER IV

THE TALISMAN

"WHAT was that?"

"What?"

"I heard something. I felt the door open."

"You're dreaming. It isn't daylight yet. Turn over and try the other side."

"Honest, Trixy," Gloria raised her voice a trifle, "I did hear something. I am going to get up and look around."

She did. It was daylight but not yet very bright, as the late fall morning was tardy in asserting itself.

"The door is open!" exclaimed Gloria. "I am sure I shut it."

"I have always told you to lock it," Trixy reminded her.

"But I hate bolted doors. They make me feel I'm being locked in a jail." Gloria shut the

door almost noiselessly, and then turned on the light.

"Nothing missing, that I can see——"

"Then, please, go back to bed," begged Trixy from the other side of the curtains. "I do hate to lose the last half hour."

"Sorry," Gloria went to the window and looked out at the early lights and shadows. Then she quietly stole back to turn off the light that hung over her dresser.

As she raised her hand her eye fell upon a strange object. There was something, a small, white paper packet on the pin tray.

"Trix!" she exclaimed excitedly. "There's something here——"

"What?"

"Get up. Let's look. It has been slipped in the door and left on the tray."

There was no mistaking the seriousness of her voice. Gloria meant what she was saying, so Trixy tumbled out of bed and joined her before the dresser.

"It's heavy," she said.

"Open it. You're not afraid of it?"

"Of course not, but I am surprised. I hope it's no more blood stones——"

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"Just that. From the Pirate's Daughter, I'll bet! Hurry and let's see! I'm quivering with——"

"Come over on the bed and spread out something," suggested Gloria. "I don't want the jools to roll under the rug this time."

They both sat under a carefully spread pink coverlet, and then, very gingerly, Gloria opened the little package.

"Maybe some trick," she guessed, still delaying inspection. "I hate to spoil our fun by finding some pop-corn, maybe."

"Oh, do give it to me," begged Trixy impatiently. "If it's pop-corn I'm not going to waste any more time over it."

"A'w right," agreed Gloria affably. "Half the responsibility is yours, don't forget that."

The white tissue paper was carefully unfolded, and then there was disclosed a little necklace, made of some dark, queer beads.

"Oh-oo-ho!" squealed Gloria. "More queer stones! And look! Here's a note!"

Eagerly scanning what was written in back-hand on a piece of plain white note paper, the girls found this:

"To GLORIA: I beg you to accept this trinket. That which was found was very precious to me. Won't you be generous enough to accept this without question?

IN COG."

They read it again. Gloria coiled the necklace around on the palm of her hand until it looked like a little black snake. Then she gave it to Trixy.

Held up to the light Trixy thought it looked like agate. Her father, she said, had a ring, his grandfather gave every boy in the family a moss agate stone each cut from the parent specimen, and this little necklace had one stone at least that looked like agate.

"But these," pointed out Gloria, "they just look like Egyptian beads I bought at our fair. Don't you know those you always liked? Black pearls, or some imitation?"

"But these are each different?"

"Yes. Sort of home-made affair. Who ever could have wished it on me?"

Both girls sat there thinking. Each turned

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her head, this way and that, cocking ears up as if some myth in the air might explain the mystery, the necklace was passed back and forth automatically, but neither offered to try it on. It was about big enough to slip over the head, and the more they scrutinized it the better they liked it.

"It's so odd," conceded Gloria.

"Not as odd as its circumstances," said Trixy. "Why in the world would a girl want to be so mysterious? Seems to me sort of sensational."

"And so wounds your social soul," teased Gloria. "Never mind, dearie, when I drag in the Pirate's Daughter from her den, it may be in the attic here, you know, and when I tame her so that she'll eat out of my hands, I fix it up to include you in our trip to her father's cave. He must be richer than old Captain Kidd to raise such a crop of gems or illuminated spangles, as I glimpsed in that trunk. Now, why couldn't In Cog have sent me a little jewelled apron or a bedizened girdle to wear to the dingus? You know we are invited?"

"Yes." The "dingus" or regular social affair exclusively for the pupils of Altmount, did not, at the moment, offer distraction.

"It seems to me we ought to detect a queer

girl, easily. She is queer, of course, or she couldn't think this way. She had to follow her own line of reasoning, and you've got to admit that's queer," said Trixy, philosophically. "Therefore she must be queer. Now, who is the queerest?"

"Impossible to select," joked Gloria, "they're all so queer. Pat's funny, Jack's funny, Jean's snippy, little Helen is just the kind of girl to get an awful crush on one. She goes about with her eyes and mouth at half mast, ready to weep or laugh at the crack of a whip; but even at that she'd never have sense enough to plan all this. Well, Ixy-love, you may wear my jools whenever thou wisheth, and be sure to note the effect. They may give you chills or you might get a fever, or even that black, squarish little stone may exert a beneficent influence on the snippy Jean and make her perlite, for once in her sour life," Gloria's manner is not transferable to words but it was flippantly funny. "Perhaps we better start a new diary, the diary of the hoo-dooed necklace," she suggested, and would have turned a somersault right then and there, had not Trixy grabbed her left leg 'on the wing.'

"And I guess we may as well crawl out and

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get into a shower," she continued, "before the infants rub their sleepy little eyes into the early sunlight. Though it looks like rain. I couldn't say anything pretty without sunlight. There's the seven-thirty bell. Would you ever believe it was more than five A. M.?"

The necklace lay on the pink coverlet while the two girls locked arms and swung back and forth like a pair of solemn Arabs. Anent nothing, they embraced always in that fashion, and the signal to halt was usually the realization of urgent duty. It was now time to dress.

"Scrum-bunctuous, anyhow," decided Gloria. "Just think of all that's happened a-ready. I cracked open a trunk, had a precious stone hid under my rug for nearly a month, returned it by way of a moldy old vase, got a note from an In Cog and was the recipient of a coal miner's souvenir, the last strike settlement maybe; all this and nothing more at Altmount, quoth the raver, Never-more! There! When it's first worn by either of us I fully expect a sensation."

"Why don't you put it right on and go down to breakfast? If a girl should notice it you might have just cause for suspicion."

"You put it on, if you want to," retorted Gloria.

"This isn't my day for necklaces. I have already decided to wear the ugly and uncomfortable sailor's noose, prescribed."

But all the day and for sometime thereafter both girls were ever on the alert to detect a clue to the original owner of the little talisman. Many strings of beads were significantly fingered and admired, but without provoking a tell-tale flush of admission, and as often as the opportunity could be made, Gloria or Trixy talked about foreign stones, especially dark ones with little light streaks running through. But at the end of a week both girls were forced to admit "no progress."

"Tell you what we'll do," proposed Gloria. "Just let's forget it. Put it away and wait. Some day the culprit will betray herself. Then, if we are not parties to some dark plot that includes hiding the queen's jools, we'll be lucky kids."

"Just as you say," agreed Trixy. "But don't forget to-night is the night we are supposed to celebrate. I hope you can express a note of interest in this here Altmount without straining your conscience. Me—I'm beginning to like it."

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"It is picking up," admitted Gloria. Both were assuming facetiousness.

There was, however, plenty of interest, "without straining consciences" at the dance. The fine old assembly room was gay with colors of many classes no longer otherwise represented, there was a very creditable orchestra composed of seniors and girls in the finishing classes, but more than these mere details, the personalities of all those present came out for the "acid test" according to Trixy.

Friends paired off, and groups assembled. Pretty gowns were praised with wordless glances of approval, new dances were demonstrated and various local peculiarities shown, even Pat declaring that the new position was quite like the "old fashioned way her mother had always insisted was the only correct way," and so on passed a happy evening, at the boy-less dance, after which, like the spreading of a map, the personalities of students stood revealed.

No silly stunts nor traditional initiations were countenanced at Altmount, not since that rather disastrous event, still talked of, but no longer risked. It was the night one girl got locked in a

closet and another climbed from the third floor window on a rope of bed sheets. Both were "laid up for repairs," and a stringent rule against all rough play or initiations was the outcome.

But there were even now some secret affairs held in junior or soph quarters, usually followed the next day by pronounced fits of absentmindedness in class. Neither Gloria nor Trixy had been invited to any of these. First years usually were not, quite contrary to the regulation college customs.

"That's because they want a chance to find out Who's Who before taking one into their exclusive circles, I suppose," Gloria remarked to Trixy, after listening for the best part of an hour to a report given by Janice. She had been asked by Jean's contingent. She had the advantage of belonging to a family whose ancestral trees were knotted by colonial ties.

"But so far as I could gather," scoffed Gloria, "it was an amateur fudge party, and the fudge got badly scorched, so I guess we didn't miss much."

"And, where-as it is against the rules to light little stoves in rooms, and the perpetrators are

apt to be censured, I guess we are well out of it," also scoffed Trixy.

"But they have to break rules, that's the main idea," Gloria explained. "Yet, it must have been pathetic to see the dear things trying to get fun out of the wicked pastime of making fudge on pin trays. I'd love to have had a view from a convenient distance."

"We'll see if we can't hire the real kitchen, some evening," suggested Trixy. "We'll ask the faculty, invite them, I mean."

"And all the kitchen staff," added Gloria. "That would be fun. And the fudge will run a far greater chance of being fit to eat."

This was held to be a brilliant idea and worth working out. So it happened that the domestic science class took on a new group of pupils unawares, and not only did Gloria and Trixy hold a fudge party in the kitchen a few afternoons later, as their part in the new year's activity but the idea spread, until pop-corn drills and taffy pulls in the kitchen became almost common. Then it was that entertaining afterwards, in rooms, while despoiled of the precious rule breaking, offered real opportunities, and as a hostess Trixy became

decidedly popular, while Gloria and Pat achieved marked success as floaters.

But such ordinary school happenings were mere calendar incidents, and like the calendar, interesting only to those who mark the days.

CHAPTER V

JACK'S SUDDEN DEPARTURE

IT was Pat who spread the news. A messenger boy had come late in the night with a telegram for Jack, and now, today, the day after the night alarm, Jack was gone!

"Some one sick or a sudden death?" hazarded Gloria. It was about time for a class and the conversation was necessarily snatchy.

"Jack doesn't seem to have folks, at least, no one comes to see her," explained the entertaining Pat, catching her blue barrett in a clump of hair much beyond its capacity.

"We'll miss her," spoke up Trixy. "I like Jack; she's a positive cure for the blues."

"Isn't she? Jack is a lark, even if she does dress like—a fire sale."

Gloria didn't smile. Pat should not be encouraged in such criticism, especially now that Jack was gone and could not defend herself.

But after the morning classes and just before lunch, it was impossible for either Gloria or Trixy not to overhear a little stronger criticism than Pat's harmless remark was intended to convey.

A group of girls behind a screen in the lavatory were even more critical and less considerate.

"Did you hear the row?" asked one.

"Did I? Thought the house was afire," from another.

"Such a voice! That woman must be a perfect tyrant. The way she shouted at poor Alty."

Gloria coughed loudly and meaningly, but the girls in the wash room rattled on.

"Couldn't a'been her mother?"

"No—a Steppy, Jack calls her."

"But why drag her away like that? In the middle of the night."

"Family affairs," tittered a new voice. "Wasn't it dramatic?"

"Can't say I think so, in an open hall and at midnight," some one grumbled.

"But she wired first."

"She should have sent the fire department first. Poor Alty was almost choked with indignation."

Trixie slammed down the shoes she was attempt-

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ing to clean, but her warning was altogether misinterpreted, for Jean Engle popped from behind the screen and claimed both Trixy and Gloria as additional debaters.

"We're just talking about poor Jack," gurgled Jean. "Isn't it a shame she had to go away? She must perfectly dread her old 'Steppy'—stepmother, and now she's dragged her off again." An uncertain sigh ended the pretended sympathy.

"Too bad she isn't long distance eared," joked Trixy, with a shade of subtlety. "I'm sure she would be flattered with such championship."

"I don't care," persisted Jean, not to be quelled in her efforts at a little excitement. "Jack never gets a chance to become interested in her work, and I suppose if she funks at exams there'll be no more mercy shown her than——"

"Hear! Hear!" broke in Arline Spragg. "Can any one imagine our Jean casting such precious bread upon the waters——"

Arline paused. A step outside gave warning and all eyes turned toward the opening curtains that divided the "lav" from a small rest room. Mary Mears' form was now framed in the shadow. Her face was white, her deep set, violet eyes seemed almost black, and there was

no mistaking her whole attitude as one of consternation.

Trixie was the first to find speech.

"Hello, Mary," she said quite casually. "We are enjoying the most popular indoor sport, backbiting."

"Yes!" Eyebrows lifted and shoulders shrugged.

"You know poor Jack is gone," chimed in Jean Engle. "Dragged away in the night by a horrid Steppy——"

"Steppy!"

"Uh-huh. That's what Jack calls her. We've never, any of us, seen her, but have all heard her. She's that sort, vulgarly noisy——"

Poor Mary's blonde head had gone higher and the white face seemed a shade more pallid as Jean gabbled on. Disgust, nothing less, except perhaps a hidden fear, was expressed in her haughty attitude, and somehow she reminded Gloria of a handsome animal trapped by refined cruelty.

"I hate gossip," Mary said, crisply.

"You do!" retorted Pat. "Well, it's a necessary evil here. We have to do something, why not gossip?"

"When a girl's back is turned?" Mary qualified.

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"But it isn't about Jack, it's the old lady. She must be a shrew. Can't we say that about her when she wakes us up in the dead of the night?" Pat retorted.

"And we are really defending Jack." This from Jean.

Gloria, being a newcomer and also in the "freshie" class, held back from the discussion. Exchanging glances with Trixy, both had plainly shown surprise that Mary should have appeared so haggard. Even her usual studied calmness was replaced by nervous little jerks, one of which caused her to drop and shatter the drinking glass.

"Oh!" she gasped. "How stupid of me!"

"Let me pick it up," offered Gloria kindly. "Trixy says I can walk on glass, just because she saw me walk over clam shells at home. Anybody here ever bathe from a shelly beach? I have one at my native dock."

This sally mercifully changed the subject, and beaches sandy, beaches rocky, or beaches shelly, were soon being discussed from as many view points as there were persons expressing them.

Mary beamed gratitude upon Gloria. It was her first unbending, and perhaps because the approval was not easy to obtain, Gloria appreciated

it more fully. She twinkled understandingly.

"I hate to be a nuisance," Mary said rather humbly, "but my hand must have been wet and the glass slipped. Do you report damages to the office?"

"Don't you dare!" thundered Pat. She was now all primped and pretty and ready for the walk or hike, as she termed the proposed exercise scheduled for the afternoon. "If you start anything so honest as paying for a broken drinking glass, I would feel absolutely bound to tell who broke the glass dish——"

"Hush, Pat. You perpetual gabber. We all hated the dish. It was too small for cookies——"

"All right, Becky dear. Don't get excited. I'm not on my way to the office."

Gloria had gathered up the splints of glass and skillfully dropped them into the marshmallow box Mary held to receive them.

"You're a dear," murmured the pale girl. "But I shouldn't have let you do it."

"You couldn't have stopped me," retorted Gloria. "Don't you know how stubborn I am? When I take a notion——"

"Come along," interrupted Trixy in an undertone. "Going to hike, Mary?"

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"I'm afraid not——"

"Oh, do," begged Gloria. "There's nothing like it for nerves, and you have a headache, haven't you?"

"A little. I didn't sleep well. Guess I'm not quite fit for this quiet life——" she smiled quizzically.

"Isn't it awful?" interrupted Trixy. "I don't know whether to bless or blame Gloria for dragging me here. But not being a quitter I suppose I'll stay."

"If you don't, I don't," declared Gloria. All three had separated themselves from the others and were now on the porch ready for the hike and awaiting the leader.

"Really, don't you like it here?" pressed Mary gently. She might not have seemed so pale but for her black satin dress. She always wore such dark colors when the uniform was not required, whereas then the other girls just melted into color glory.

"We are rather spoiled, I'm afraid," admitted Trixy. "Little Glo has lately distinguished herself as an engineer; that is, she discovered a river the engineers had overlooked, and what hasn't happened in the way of good fortune since

that eventful day!" Trixy intoned reminiscently.

"How interesting!" Mary said politely.

"Since you're telling tales, Trixy, I might add—" drawled Gloria, "that the engineer, the young, handsome and all that sort of thing young fellow, is a special friend of yours. There is the barest possibility she misses him—"

"Glo!"

"And he's gone off again following my dear dad! Way out Philippine way—"

"Just for that you shan't see my letter!"

"A letter! From Sherry?"

"Sherwood, please. He has outgrown Sherry. Want to see his stationery?"

The inscribed envelope (from Trixy's pocket) was passed around. Gloria read it backwards and forwards, made fun of it and approved in the same breath. Then it was handed over to Mary.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "that name seems familiar. Was he abroad last year?"

"Yes. Were you?" asked Trixy simply.

"Yes, that is—yes," floundered Mary, and a hint of confused color touched up the pale cheeks.

"How jolly! Did you really know our noble Sherry?" demanded Gloria quite enthused.

"Oh, I wouldn't just say that," Mary answered

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with a return of her usual restraint. "One meets others while travelling, and sometimes we see names on the hotel lists——"

"But we must tell Sherry," Gloria rattled on. "Trix, do you mind if I write?"

"I'll put in a little censored note——"

"I'm sure he has never heard of me, of Mary Mears," declared Mary, just as Miss Alton, otherwise "Alty" and little Miss Taylor, otherwise "Whisper" appeared and marshalled forces for the four mile hike.

There was opportunity for confidences along the way, and Mary's attitude was seriously discussed by the two girls from Sandford.

"She's high-spirited," declared Trixy.

"And touchy," added Gloria.

"I can't just see why she acts so offish."

"Seems to keep the brake on every minute."

"Afraid of hills—sliding, I mean."

"Into reality. I've thought of that."

"She's a splendid contrast to Jack, isn't she?" concluded Gloria, as the hikers halted at Van Winkle's Spring. Then Old Rip entertained most royally.

CHAPTER VI

SMOLDERING FIRES

"ALTMOUNT" was so named from the fact that the Alton family had settled, built and managed the mount for more than four generations. The original homestead was now the smallest of the three imposing structures that clung to the hill-sides, and was used to house the youngest pupils of the select school, while in a splendid stone and shingle structure recently built, and unquestionably an important executive building for the seminary proper, were domiciled Gloria and Trixy.

Gloria might have been relegated to No. 2 known as the Wigwam, from a curious Indian legend attached to it, but somehow the influential Trixy succeeded in keeping her friend with her. Not quite sixteen, country life and natural fondness for healthy exercise had developed Gloria into the attractive personality termed "wholesome," but comparing this with the uncertain ages

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and equally uncertain types about her, very often the "sweet sixteen" was mistaken for seventeen or even greater "teens."

Now, Pat was seventeen, and she might have been classed among the "little ones." She was small, round, dimply and "bubblely." It would be hard to imagine Pat ever supporting with dignity her real title, Patricia Halliday. Jean Engle was tall and willowy, and wore brown braids in a coronet about her head. She had rather a sharp tongue, and unfortunately her friends laughed at "her cuts." The comparative isolation of boarding school naturally drew out and magnified each girl's peculiar traits, so that what might have seemed rude in Jean at home was hailed as "good fun" at Altmount.

It was she who suddenly checked Gloria's laughter. The departure of Jack had not yet ceased to be a subject for gossip, when a group of the girls were squatted around the Sentinel Pine, the only one tree upon the spacious grounds allowed to foster from year to year the carpet of pine needles about its roots. These were not raked up because they formed so splendid a little rest ground for the fortunate girls who "got there first."

"You're not a bit like your cousin," announced Jean out of a clear sky, favoring Gloria with a critical look at the same moment.

"You mean Hazel?" floundered Gloria, sensing objection in Jean's pert remark.

"Of course. Hazel seems so—oh, so sort of—well——"

"Do say it, Jean. Glo will forgive you," broke in Pat characteristicly.

"Oh, you see," interfered Trixy, "Hazel is temperamental. She has a voice. See how short a time she stayed here. Just a brief year——"

"Where is Hazel now?" asked Blanche Baldwin.

"She is at home when not at the conservatory," replied Gloria. "Hazel really has a promising voice."

"Ye-ah," drawled Pat, with an uncertain smile and an impolite gulp.

"But I meant that, somehow, you don't seem a bit like Hazel—in your ways," came back Jean without so much consideration as a direct address with Gloria's name to soften it.

Gloria bit her lip. Pat bit hers so hard it dragged the dimple out of her chin. Trixy, as usual, knew just what to say and she said it.

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"Hazel has rather sophisticated ways for a girl brought up in Sandford. But then, it has always seemed to me, that big town folks are apt to overdo it; like strangers trying on the Boston accent."

Gloria smiled at Trixy's adroitness. She had deliberately turned the interests from Gloria's possible mannerisms to Hazel's. Still, a suppressed little twinge tugged at her consciousness. Was she different from the other girls? Were her tom-boyish, country ways rude or even rough?

More than once she had noticed surprised eyes staring at her when impulsively she had said or done something as she might have done at her old Barbend home, when Tommy Whitely would have shouted with glee or Mildred Graham chuckled delightedly. But no such result was achieved at Altmount. The girls there, with the exception of Pat and perhaps one or two others, all seemed bent upon outdoing their companions in correct social behavior.

A sort of pairing off followed the discussion of Hazel's ways. That she had a wonderful voice all were willing to concede, but just what Jean meant by her comparison with Gloria was not

clear, at least not satisfactorily clear to Gloria, or her special friends, including Pat.

The school cliques, inevitable, were again being set in motion. Clubs or Sororities were forbidden, as they had been the cause of more than one bitter quarrel among the girls in past years, when the faculty had tolerated the Bluejays, or the Social Sixes or even the Gabfesters, but a girl like Jean is sure to lead in a subtle way. Her pronounced opinions are always easier to accept than to combat, and just now she was "making up" something quite "clicquey."

"The deceitful thing," murmured Pat, when girl after girl slipped away from the pine needle carpet to follow Jean's unspoken suggestion. "And she ate more of our pop-corn than any other three eaters added up."

"Was she a great friend of Hazel's?" asked Gloria. Her dark eyes were glinting under rather fluttering lids, and a "set expression," as good old Jane would have described it, seemed to have suddenly burned out Gloria's happiness fuse.

"Jean is always pals with the airyfied ones," said Pat, answering Gloria's question. "The way she eats them up makes me—suspicious."

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Trixie broke into a genuine laugh. Pat could say the wisest things in the queerest way.

"But I notice she didn't gobble you up," went on Pat to TRIXIE. "How come?"

"Do you suppose I am in the way?" Gloria had not yet found a smile and was plainly pouting.

"Silly baby!" chided TRIXIE. "If you really have saved me from anything like that——" sweeping a hand toward the departing contingent, "then indeed, I am more than grateful."

"Oh, I have it," exploded Pat. "Let's get up an opposition!"

"To what?" inquired TRIXIE.

"To—to Jean, of course."

"I wouldn't satisfy her to do anything of the sort," sniffed Gloria.

"But don't you see they are planning something?" asked Pat.

"Who cares?" retorted Gloria. "I'm getting sort of homesick, I guess, but I just would like a whole day away from—all this." A suspicion of tears dimmed her eyes.

"You have been a perfect lamb, Glo," declared TRIXIE, winding her arm about the younger girl's shoulders in sympathy. "Never made a mite of trouble."

"But you are sort of used to—to changing about, aren't you, Glo?" asked Pat, quite innocently.

"Why, Pat, what do you mean?" demanded Gloria, sensing an undercurrent to the last remark.

"Oh, I don't mean you have been to other schools, or that sort of thing," returned Pat, brightening up in alarm at Gloria's tone, "but you see, Hazel was—talkative, and she told everybody how you lived at her house, and about—your mother being dead and all that." There was no mistaking Pat's own sincerity.

"So that's it!" A wave of understanding flooded over Gloria. "They think I lived *on* Hazel's folks! Poor relation—" bitterly.

"Gloria Doane, I won't have you getting such foolish notions in your pretty head," interrupted Trixy. "If folks don't know what you and your dad have done for Hazel and her folks, it is only because you are both too high principled to let it be known." Trix's eyes were now flashing and her open defense of Gloria was just what any one knowing Beatrix Travers would have expected.

Gloria smiled cynically. "Just the same, Trix, those girls have no use for the cousin Hazel has

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told them all about. Not that I mind, really, for I have all I care for, but somehow—Oh, what's the use?" she broke off sullenly.

"Rudeness is the meanest sort of cut, always," took up a new voice just as quiet Mary Mears glided up to the little party, from behind the hedge that outlined the path.

"Oh, hello, Mary!" greeted Pat. "Come along and join the wake. You're welcome," and she made a place on the big low cut stump.

"I always thought boarding school was composed of sets, little clicques, you know," continued Mary, "now I'm sure of it. Of course, I'm on the very outer rim——"

"Nothing of the sort," spoke up Trixy with spirit. "If we care to we may, very easily, have a better, if not bigger, crowd than Jean Engle has. I hate to start things, but as Pat says, there's no use standing still and applauding their efforts. What do you say, Mary? Shall we organize?"

"I'd love to, but——"

"Now forget the 'buts' and let's!" exclaimed Pat joyfully. "I've been in the dumps since Jack went. Never knew how much I depended upon Jack for amusement," her voice trailed off. "Poor old Jack! I wonder where she is and—why?"

Gloria had not raised her head and therefore could not see the swift change that swept over Mary's pale face. Trixy again intervened.

"If we organize what is to be our object?" she asked.

"Fun," snapped Pat.

"Of what sort?" persisted Trixy.

"Oh, every kind. We can't exactly effect riots in this retreat," mocked Pat, "but we might get up some highly interesting rows. There's nothing like a real, tip-top scrap to set the feathers flying." An anticipatory chuckle gave warning of Pat's active intentions.

"But really, Trix," spoke up Gloria, "I have no idea of making a martyr of you on my account. You don't belong in our baby class and we all know perfectly well that the other girls are crazy to get you in their set, but well, I don't blame them really, for not wanting to bother with me."

A ripple of delicious laughter was Trixy's reply.

"Oh, if you feel that way about it——" began Pat merrily.

All this time Mary appeared to be listening abstractedly. Gloria's face was serious, with quite an unusual expression for her, but Mary always serious, now seemed actually depressed.

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The late November day was warm and glowing as any in October, and shadows shot through the giant pine, making murky haloes about the heads beneath. Altogether conditions conspired toward plots and intrigue. It had taken just that long for the usual hikes, lake pleasures, tennis and such sports to lose their interest, and now with the brisk, crisp air of winter's foreshadow, the pupils at Altmount, naturally, swung to more original forms of recreations.

Pat had been doing most of the talking since Jean so pointedly gathered her chums to other stamping grounds. Of course, Trixy did her best to banish Gloria's ill humor, the result of that remark from Jean concerning Hazel's and Gloria's mannerisms, but the cloud was still there, just as Mary's moody aloofness was more pronounced as she attempted to hide it.

"Then we're to have a clan," repeated Pat. "We'll ask all the girls who are not manacled to Jean's ankles."

"Really, Pat, it wouldn't be fair to take Trixy from the seniors," interrupted Gloria.

"Say, Glo!" in quick succession interrupted Pat. "Whatever has come over you? Why the martyr's crown?"

Gloria swung her chin around and up high in mock contempt. "I was never sure I'd like boarding school," she remarked evenly. "Now I know I don't," she declared emphatically.

"Just because catty Jean Engle digs——"

"No, Pat, that isn't it. It's because I'm not the sort that fits in."

"You're not the sort that follows the crowd," broke in Trixy, "but you do fit in, Gloria. Any one can follow the band wagon," declared Trixy with unmistakable scorn.

"What made you jump so, Mary?" asked the outspoken little Pat. "Do you hate band wagons worse than 'pizen'?"

"Yes," said Mary quite helplessly, and even Gloria stared in surprise.

"Seems to me we better adjourn, as the lawyers say 'sine die.' We are having such a deplorable time," concluded Trixy. Even her good nature could be tried too far.

Gloria got to her feet first and looked resolutely at the big building on the hill top.

"Don't go hating it," cautioned Trixy, kindly sensing her emotion.

"No, indeed. I'll have to—conquer it now," replied Gloria bravely.

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"I wish I could feel as you do," remarked Mary. She was the gloomiest of all.

"How *do* you feel?" demanded Pat.

"Like running away," admitted Mary, her lips drawn tight.

"But you wouldn't! Mary, have you had a sorrow?" asked Trixy impulsively in an undertone.

A quivering lip left words unnecessary.

Trixie linked her arm into Mary's and the long delayed confidence was under way.

"She'll cut you out, first thing you know," warned Pat in Gloria's nearest ear.

"For Trixy's sake I hope she does," declared the sullen girl who even turned aside from Pat's good-natured arm.

This was the stage of boarding school life usually classified as "the reaction," and upon just what course the girls would now take depended much of the year's pleasures or disappointments.

That Gloria and Mary were alike disappointed was very evident, but the cause!

Gloria's highly sensitive nature was feeling keenly the slights aimed at her by Jean's contingent, but why Mary Mears should go from the quiet stage to the actual melancholy was puzzling every one.

Would she confide in Trixy?

Would Trixy ever choose any one in Gloria's place?

And above all, what was the reason that Jacquinot Corday left school several times during the term?

Inquisitive, carefree, little Pat seemed to thrive on the possible replies to such questions, but Gloria's own heart was too heavy for speculation. She longed for the freedom that lent personal activity, she hated doing things because they should be done, and she was unconsciously preparing for an attack. The smoldering fire is sure to blaze up sometime.

CHAPTER VII

BRONCHO BILLY

"BUT it isn't like you to mope, Gloria," reasoned Trixy, with a suspicion of reproof.

"I know, Trix, but I just feel I am—country!"

"If you mean natural, I'll agree. The city has a knack of artifice. But why you should let a word from that feather brain, Jean, so affect you?"

"It wasn't that alone. I've felt ever since I came that Hazel had branded me as the poor relation, the little orphan Annie——"

"Oh, Hazel isn't really mean——"

"No, but she's so high and mighty that her very compliments sting," argued the miserable Gloria. "Truly, Trix, I don't care a rap for myself, but I've been selfish about you. They didn't ask you to ride yesterday, I noticed."

"I had a glorious canter before their old horses were out of the stalls," flung back Trixy. "I

hate riding in a crowd. It's like travelling with a party. Every move is subject to the schedule, prearranged. Besides, I made a discovery while out on my run, and if you are a good girl I'll disclose it to you."

"Be a lamb and tell me the glad tidings," coaxed Gloria. "I'm just dying for something new. Don't you hate the rules and regulations that put us asleep, wake us up, feed us, think for us—"

"Gloria Doane! You little wild oriole, with your black head and new sweater!" laughed Trixy. "I'm afraid you really do need the Altmount discipline. You have been such a free little creature all your life." Trixy looked absently out the window over the wavering trees, some already leafless, others gorgeously colorful. She was remembering Gloria Doane at her seaside, Barbend home, and again recalling the heroic Gloria, who a few months ago, had fought her way out of a flooded house, where with the little boy, Marty, she had become imprisoned. This was the great adventure related in "Gloria" and comparing the girl of such adventures with the one Trixy now confronted, it was not unreasonable indeed to find her rebelling, straining at the

silken cords of Altmount's restrictions. But Trixy's life had been very different. The child of wealth is born to responsibilities, and they scarcely ever include escapes from flooded cellars, or the rescue of frightened children surrounding helplessly sick mothers.

"You know, Gloria," spoke Trixy again, "there really is a lot to learn here. We couldn't expect to find everything rosy; that would mean deadly monotony."

"Oh, I know I'm horrid to grumble," promptly admitted Gloria, "but I do like to do things. There seems so little to do here except follow rules."

"Why don't you put on the charmed necklace? That might precipitate an adventure," suggested Trixy.

"Put it on! No, indeedy. I'm glad it's on your side of the curtain," declared Gloria, "for I do get strange fancies concerning the thing. The more I try to solve the mystery of the original owner, the further I get from it. Do you suppose there is some one here not really a pupil——"

"Maggie?" mocked Trixy.

"No. Of course not Maggie. But there are

rather queer folks sauntering around. There's the official mender, for instance. That one who wears a wig to hide her shaved head, according to Pat. Now, she might really own a trunk, and those home-made beads look rather like her. Just imagine me wearing a gift from her."

Trixie laughed uproariously at the possibility, and she finally decided with Gloria, that the necklace had better be kept in seclusion.

"But I had an adventure this morning," again promised Trixy.

"Tell me about it," begged Gloria. "Was there a nice woozy old tramp in it or, mayhap, a plumed knight?"

"Neither. But let's take our constitutional. These walls—might have ears," cautioned Trixy.

"So secret as that! Goody!" Gloria executed a little skip over to the curtained closet, snatched her cap off a hook and clapped it on her head. "Every one seems late this morning," she remarked. "We can have the birch lane all to ourselves. Hurry and give me the thrill. I'm famished for it."

But as they tried to slip out, more than one hail from peekers in doorways demanded to know whence and why, and evading the rebound of Pat,

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who dashed into the "lav" and intended to dash out again, was not altogether a simple matter. In fact, the tower stairs were finally used as a means of escape.

"Hurry!" whispered Trixy. "The side door is open."

"Tell me!" begged Gloria. "I'm fairly quivering with expectancy."

"It's about Jack," began Trixy, catching her breath.

"Is she back?"

"She must be. I saw her before breakfast."

"Where?"

"That's my story, but you're spoiling it all with your unromantic questions. Please, as the witnesses say, let me tell it in my own way."

"Proceed," ordered Gloria, with a flourish of her free arm.

"You know I went out very early——"

"I do."

"But I didn't waken you. I heard you breathing awake long before."

"Yes, I was awake. Really, Trix, I'm afraid I was a bit homesick. But never mind me. Can't you feel me tr-r-r-em-bell, awaiting your story?"

"Walking at this pace is an absorbing occupation," objected Trixy. "Let's sit down and talk like civilized folks."

A squat on the big rustic bench under the Twin Oaks didn't look very civilized, but it was better for confidence than was racing.

"I was just turning in with 'Whirlwind,' (he's a lovely little horse,) when I saw or rather heard a party trotting along from the Sound Road," began Trixy. "They were on a regular trot and coming like the wind. I pulled to one side to let them pass, and that put me behind the line of low cedars. They couldn't see me but I faced them——"

"Who?"

"I only recognized one. Jack. You should have seen her! She looked like a poster girl."

"Jack!"

"Yes. Her hair was loose, it must have fallen from under her hat, a brown felt, and her habit! It wasn't a habit at all, but shirt and trousers like a regular little Broncho Billy!"

"Our Jack——"

"Yes, indeed. I might not have believed my eyes if my ears hadn't helped. Just as her horse swung into the lane she called to him. It was

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certainly Jack's voice," declared Trixy, still mildly excited over the unusual encounter.

"And who was with her? You said others——" prompted Gloria, foreseeing an interesting escapade in Jack's assuming the rôle of a Broncho Billy.

"Yes, there was a woman and she also was an expert rider, besides—now get a good long breath, Glo, you'll need it," warned Trixy. "The other member of the wild rider's troop was a perfectly stunning looking young fellow."

"Oh, how delightful! Oh, how exciting," sighed Gloria. "How ever has Jack kept such a plot all to herself?"

"Perhaps she hasn't. You forget *we* are comparative strangers."

"And out of the confidence club," a hint of yesterday's bitterness flashed through that remark.

"But what particularly struck me," resumed Trixy, ignoring the cynicism, "was the wonderful mounts, the absolute expertness of those three riders. They certainly are professionals," she insisted.

"Oh, I have it!" exclaimed Gloria. "My trunk mystery! Jack belongs to—to a troupe!"

"A troupe!" For a moment Trixy was mystified.

"You know," insisted Gloria, "the strange trunk I opened? And all the—glittering stuff?"

"Oh, yes. Of course. You—we have never solved that mystery——"

"And Jack is always so sort of spectacular! Oh Trix, do you really think she might belong to a circus?"

"A circus! How ever could a circus performer get into Altmount?"

"That's so. This is rather an exclusive place. I recall that your mother had to *vouch* for me."

"Gloria Doane! You are a perfect little simpleton! No one had to *vouch* for you. Your own mother attended one of the Alton schools and her name was an excellent voucher. All my mater had to do was to——"

"Say she knew me, and my dad, and all the rest of the family!" Scorn mocked the words.

Trixie tossed her head back impatiently. Gloria's humility was plainly far from genuine, but she swung quickly to her friend's side and threw an affectionate arm around her.

"Darling Trix," she whispered. "I am getting to be a horrid prig, I know it. Just plain

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vanity, of course. But for mercy sakes, tell me about Jack's chariot race. We'll have to go indoors directly and I haven't heard half."

"There really isn't any more to tell," replied Trixy. She smiled forgiveness into Gloria's eyes, however. "They had ridden a long distance, that was evident, and I just wish you could have seen what a raving beauty Jack looked."

"War paint."

"Strange I never thought of that, I do believe she might have had some queer color on her face——"

"What fun!" cried Gloria, springing to her feet and threatening to dance. "Do you suppose we'll see her in all her togs? Which way did she go? Didn't you even shout at her?"

"No, to your last question but I couldn't keep track of the others. I was so surprised when I recognized her I couldn't even shout. Besides, all three seemed very serious. I would not have dared break in on them. Who, do you suppose, the woman was?"

"Her Steppy, of course, stepmother, you know. It is she, according to friend Pat, who drags Jack away in the night. Perhaps she does, too, if she's a trooper," reasoned Gloria.

"Well, at any rate, Glo, I guess we have discovered something. I know you've been aching for it, and I feel, somehow, a chunk, a good sized chunk of your special brand of excitement has actually arrived."

"You don't mean that Jack will come out and declare herself!" exclaimed Gloria. "Perhaps we won't see or hear another word about it." That possibility brought gloom.

"But others saw her," reasoned Trixy. They were now retracing their steps and about to meet a group of girls also returning from their early morning exercise.

"Who saw her?" asked Gloria.

"I don't know just who it was, but certainly some very slim girl dodged me, as I walked back from the stables. It looked a bit like Mary."

"Oh, we'll ask her," declared Gloria. "At any rate Mary's getting so friendly it would be nice to sort of take her in our confidence. Don't you think so?"

"Well——" Trixy paused. Then continued: "Suppose we don't say anything for a while and just see what happens. I wouldn't want her to start anything sensational, you know."

"Oh, of course. There, you see, I would have

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blurted out the whole fantastic story and perhaps made a mortal enemy of the picturesque Jack. After all, Trixy, I am country and green, don't you think so?"

"Have it your own way," replied Trixy with a light laugh. "I don't intend to go on forever telling you what a darling you are."

But she looked as if she might go on doing so for quite a while longer.

CHAPTER VIII

ALMOST A TRAGEDY

AN unusual amount of school work filled the day beyond possibility of moods, broods or other tantrums. Gloria was not so temperamental as to neglect her work for "blues," whatever the cause or however deep the shade. She was no baby, and was too proud to do otherwise than very well in any school records.

There were, reasonably enough, many spots unfinished in her preparatory work, for Barbend, like other country schools, embraced only such work as seemed to afford the best opportunities for the largest number, and few there were who prepared for high class boarding schools. Thus Gloria now found herself filling in many recreational hours with special tutors in sheltered corners of gloomy rooms. All of which added to her growing uneasiness, for Gloria was the type that loves to soar, like the butterfly, but a single

prick in a delicate wing is sure to bring down the joy bird.

Yet Jack's rough rider adventure promised a thrill. Lessons would be disposed of as quickly as their importance would allow, and then Gloria would, first look for Pat and then, perhaps, they both might look for the romantic rider of the mountain trail.

The prospect whipped up Gloria's lagging spirits to the bubbling point. She sensed mystery, she hoped for a real lark, somehow all the restraint of Altmount seemed mere atmosphere in the secret contemplation of that one, fearless girl, with that handsome young man and the "Steppy," possibly with all the fairy tale attributes of horrid gray hair, a witch's face, a crone's raspy voice and everything! How perfectly delicious! A story fit for any one, even the insatiable Pat. So it was that all day, in spite of the extra drill preparing for tests, Gloria involuntarily made pictures of Jacquinot Corday, the girl bareback rider, champion circus performer, etc.

"Just imagine Jean and her crowd actually associating with a circus rider," she ruminated. "And wouldn't Pat howl gleefully!"

She longed to talk it over with Trixy, but the

difference in their grades meant almost complete separation of the chums during the school hours, and even Pat must have been critically busy, for not a glimpse of her red head broke the sombre shadow of Gloria's horizon all the long day.

Nor did Jack herself appear on the scene. After lunch and before the second afternoon period, Gloria deliberately sought out Pat. She was discovered in a head-on collision with a large, green covered book, whose make up indicated helps for the helpless, "trots" for the weary, and suggestions for those struggling in the tangled ways of English Lit.

"Hello, yourself!" mumbled Pat, anticipating a greeting. "Yes, I'm nearly dead, how do you feel yourself?"

Gloria laughed outright. "Poor old Pat!" she soothed. "What's the worst thing in life just now?"

"That old googled-eyed dame that's supposed to teach us Lit., but really blasts our young dreams with her crazy ideas of original work." Scorn fairly sizzed through the ill chosen words. "The idea of giving us such a theme as 'Modern Cynicism! Its effect on Youth.' Now, if you ask me what is the effect of cynicism on youth, I

would just answer ‘Mary Mears.’ She’s the result of that effect.”

“Oh, Pat, cheer up!” quoth Gloria. “Have you seen Jack?”

“Seen Jack?” incredulously.

“Yes. She’s back, isn’t she?”

“She isn’t, is she?”

Gloria laughed. “I heard she was——”

“And I heard she wasn’t.”

“Honestly, Pat, joking aside, isn’t Jack back?”

“No joking to put aside. I hate to repeat, considering the English Lit. and google-eyed Rachel Sander’s hopes for real stuff, but choose a new style, Glo, and come right out frank and honest. Tell me what you mean by your bag full of question marks. Who saw Jack and when?”

“Why——” The word was drawled to hide rather than to disclose any meaning.

“Now you’re holding back,” declared the keen witted Pat, deliberately folding over a half page of the big book. “What do you know about Jack? I am almost dead since she left. Jack is a human blotter, wipes out all the day’s blots with her dashing surprises. There, I almost went literary that time, didn’t I? Although I could see Jack making more blots that she obliterated.

Another good word," with ready pencil noted, "and I'll stick in some place if I have to obliterate Rachel with it," declared Pat. "Meanwhile, Glo, I'm waiting to hear the news."

"That's exactly what I came for," flung back Gloria, "and you haven't even asked me to sit down."

"Do."

"Where?"

"Oh, I'm rather crowded," with a supercilious glance at her untidy room. "You see, every one comes in to help me and they eat my fudge, look in my mirror, try my powder and Blanche Baldwin tried my comb."

"May I try your trunk?"

"Certainly. Help yourself, although that's a perfectly brand new trunk and it almost got lost in the shuffle. Wait, I'll fix the cover nice and smooth. There," and as she shook the Indian blanket to replace it as a cover, Gloria saw a black enamelled trunk, exactly like the one she had opened by mistake!

"Your trunk—is just like mine," she said, as naturally as her surprise permitted.

"Really? I thought I was very much ahead in trunks," said Pat, easily. "Although I believe

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the salesman did say the style was going merrily. Glad my key is registered, if it did give me a lot of trouble when I lost it by taking too good care of it."

"Registered?" Gloria repeated, recalling her experience with the same key fitting the two trunks.

"Yes. That's a feature of this trunk, and if yours is like it don't lose your key. There is only one of a kind made, a little difference in each lock, I presume, so the owner is supposed to be key proof. But why this digression? Do you think I am interested in mechanics rather than in Jack?"

"No," said Gloria, recovering her composure. That trunk mystery seemed to be burying itself deeper daily. Of course she never dreamed of little Pat being a "pirate's daughter," but the sudden view of a trunk apparently just like the one in question, had startled her. Now, she must appease Pat's curiosity without divulging even a hint of Trixy's early morning adventure, and this would be no simple matter, Gloria knew from experience.

"I'm scared to death of the exams," she admitted, by way of introduction. "It seems to me, I have done nothing for weeks but try to patch

up holes in my prep. work. I wonder if I shall ever be able to stand the college entrance exams?"

"Don't try. Isn't this hard enough?" The "trot" book came in for a demonstrative slam.

"But I want to go in for science," explained Gloria. "You see my early training——"

"Oh, ye-ah, so early you'll forget it before the educational day is half over," prophesied Pat. "But about Jack. Let's go hunt her up. I'll bet she's got a wild story to relate, and a wild story would just about save my life this very minute."

"Don't tempt Fate," cautioned Gloria.

"Tempt Fate! I'd bribe the dear old thing if I knew what she liked best. Come along, Snooksy. Let's hope for the best, or worst, if you feel as I do about it."

"But your English? Didn't I interrupt——"

"A real mercy. When Patricia Halliday goes in for cramming, I tell you, chile, she sure does cram. Oh boy!" The chuckle that verified this also repudiated it, as Pat said, according to one's viewpoint.

The search for Jack began with a little twittering whistle along the corridor, leading up to "fourteen" the number on a partly opened door.

"You're right. The prodigal has returned,"

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whispered Pat, dodging past Jean's door and actually bending double as she sprinted past Edna Hobb's. "Plugging away" for the quarterly exams meant that rooms might hide the anxious students in their safest corners.

But the open door proved a false alarm. Jack was not found within.

"She has been here," reasoned Gloria. "Here's her bag and there's her hat."

"Surest thing. She may be down telling it all to Alty. Let's peek," suggested Pat.

Gloria's critical eye swept the room. No sign of rough-rider outfit was in sight. Instead, there were the tweed top coat, the smart rainbow sport hat, and a very much beaded one piece, brown silk jersey dress. Jack was noted for showy clothes, and they were always of a very good and costly quality.

Beads suggested the trunk secret to Gloria's mind, and even the brown, slinking, silky gown, that should have been put away in a box, and wasn't, hinted the iridescent grandeur that lay so helplessly in the top of the strange trunk. That, and the big gem labelled "Precious" in the envelope, and the consequent necklace all were now recalled.

"Yes," she was deciding, "it surely must have been Jack's trunk. But what could the materials have been used for? And if the stone in the envelope really were precious why should it have been left to the uncertain travel of ordinary baggage?"

In line with that secret reasoning Pat uncannily remarked:

"You know, I have always thought Jack is just hiding something with all her show off. I wouldn't wonder but she's as deep as a well underneath the surface."

"Why should she hide anything?" Gloria asked. They were on the second landing and now safe from possible interruptions.

"The Steppy, you know. She surely is a queer one. You just ought to hear her pass remarks, about one o'clock A. M. in the lower hall with the mezzanine floor lined with listening ladies! What the girls don't guess isn't worth considering. Guessing is their one strong line. But I like Jack, you know, Gloria, and I'm not catty enough to join in the slaughter."

"I can't see why girls are so—so snobbish," returned Gloria.

"Born that way, like hair lips," said Pat, now

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ready to "peek" in the office door, which, like others, stood ajar.

"Oh!"

Both girls exclaimed, for instead of peeking in the door they almost collided with demure little Miss Taylor.

"Looking for Miss Alton?" she asked agreeably.

"Oh, no," replied Pat. "The fact is, we are trying to (whisper) dodge her. But have you seen Jack Corday?"

"Why, no. She is away, is she not?"

"Was, but isn't," answered Pat. Gloria was not yet so familiar even with the amiable Miss Taylor as to join in the repartee.

"Oh, is she back?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," Gloria did say that. She felt obliged to say something, and she smiled audibly to heighten the effect.

"When you ought to be poring over your books. Well, I haven't seen Jack and I'm in charge of the office," announced Miss Taylor.

"Oh, is Alty away?" squealed Pat.

"Tem-por-air-i-ly!" Miss Taylor was not much more than a school girl herself.

"The berries!" cheered Pat. "Come along,

Glo, and continue the hunt. If Jack is in Altmount we'll find her! Let exams take care of themselves for a while," and she dragged the willing Gloria along, out through the heavy doors, down the deserted path making straight for the gym.

"If she's around she'll surely be walking a ceiling or resting up on double flips. She's the queerest girl. Hard work is her idea of loafing."

All this increased Gloria's suspicion. It sounded too much like circus ability to be anything else.

But no Jack was found in the gym, either walking ceilings, or doing double flips.

"Well, perhaps she is in some corner of the Wigwam, safe in the arms of the babes," suggested Pat, rather disconsolately. "Let's give up the hunt and go along the lake drive for a change. I really must work hard to make up some points, and perhaps a real lively walk will tune me up."

"I need one myself," agreed Gloria. "How is this pace?"

"Suits me. You do take lovely long steps for such a little girl."

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"I'm not little. I expect to be tall and imposing like Trix, some day," announced Gloria.

"Isn't the air wonderful?" Patricia Halliday was getting a better complexion with every stride.

"This is one fine feature of Altmount," declared Gloria. "Even Barbend of my fairy childhood dreams, was not better supplied with beautiful walks."

At a rapid pace the two students confronted the brisk November air. It was exhilarating, delightful.

Then suddenly both halted! Neither spoke but gasped.

Upon the bank of the lake, in the narrow strip of green that folded the path from the water were—garments!

"Jack's sweater!" gasped Pat.

"And her—tam!" added Gloria.

Startled they stooped over the glaring green coat and hat.

"How could they come here?" breathed Gloria.

"She must have brought them. But where can she be?"

Somehow a coat and hat by the side of a lashing lake seemed ominous. No more joking

about Jack's uncanny athletic ability. Neither suggested she might be up a tree, or—

"Oh!" screamed Gloria. "I see a canoe paddle. Pat, look!"

"Away out in the torrent!" gasped Pat. "Oh, Gloria, if—"

"And see! There's—the—canoe—!"

"Empty!" brave little Pat seemed suddenly helpless and leaned, for a moment, on the terrified Gloria. A rush of horror seized them. What if Jack—

"Pat! What shall we do! Can you swim?" cried Gloria.

"Swim! In that ice water?"

"But if we could reach the canoe! She might be near it!"

"Gloria Doane! Don't you dare think of such a thing."

"I've got to, Pat. I'm a safe swimmer, and the canoe is not so far out. Here, help me out of my things, I'll bring the canoe back, at least."

"Gloria!"

But the next moment there was a splash, then the waving up and down of lithe, white arms, as stroke after stroke took Gloria further from land and nearer the drifting canoe.

The impetuous act had been prompted by an irresistible impulse. Gloria Doane of Barbend, the seaside town, knew well the price of a moment's delay against the water's cruelty, and neither the current nor the icy lake could restrain her.

Pat watched the flashing arms and the small dark head, fascinated. Then she screamed, wildly, shrilly, until the terror in her voice penetrated the hills and reached the very walls of Altmount.

Distracted she screamed again and called for help, until presently answering voices bore down, and girl after girl came racing to the lakeside.

All eyes focussed upon the speck in the water, but now Gloria was beside the canoe and the girls waited breathlessly.

To get into a canoe from the water is an expert's task, but Gloria was that. She placed herself in direct line with the crescent bow, put both hands up, one on either side, and slid in like some humanized fish. What she then saw appalled her.

A mute figure lay on the bottom of the boat! And the white face of Jacquinot Corday seemed frozen there in deathlike mobility.

"Oh," choked Gloria. "Jack! Dear Jack!"

But the drifting little bark still clipped the waves playfully, innocent of the danger now so fearful to Gloria.

"Oh!" she gasped, "what shall I do? No paddle!" But water like fire must be met with heroic measures, and with a strength surprising to herself she managed to rip loose two slats from the side of the canoe, then quickly she slipped from Jack's inert form a thin white skirt. Jabbing each slat through this she constructed a sail, and holding them in place above her, she felt the wind take hold and drive them forward.

Not until she had veered the boat on its direct course toward shore, did she have opportunity to look critically upon Jack.

"Jack?" she called anxiously. Then she saw one limp hand raised feebly. She peered down closer but there was no further movement.

Jack was not dead but unconscious!

She must be revived, quickly. The girls upon the bank were shouting, calling, but Gloria edged up carefully. Then she cupped a handful of water and splashed it upon the deathlike features.

Just a fluttering of the eyelids rewarded this test. Then Gloria took her sail in both hands,

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held it bravely to the breeze and drove back to the shore, where frantic companions awaited, helpless.

"Oh!" yelled Pat, "didn't—you—see—"

"I have her! She's here!" called back Gloria, sailing in like some heroic war maiden, clad only in her thin underslip, but unmindful of the dripping water and the cutting frosty air.

"Gloria!" came a blend of voices.

"Be careful," she answered. "I guess—she has—fainted!"



GLORIA HELD HER "SAIL" WITH BOTH HANDS
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CHAPTER IX

FROM ICY WATERS

"HERE, Gloria, get into this and run! We'll take care of Jack."

Trixie gave this order, with it wrapping a heavy coat around Gloria, who was still standing in that pitiful little wet slip.

"I'm all right," she declared, chattering.

But Pat was almost hysterical. "She'll die! She'll get pneumonia! And Jack! Oh, Jack must be dead——"

"Here, Pat, chase along with Gloria and don't let her stop, do you hear? Race her like a horse, right up to the house. Keep her blood pumping——"

"All right," agreed Pat, grasping Gloria's hand and starting off with her. Action was what she needed.

Meanwhile Jack had opened her eyes, dazedly and so unlike the happy, mocking girl she had been

in that time, now so hard to recall, but only a day or two ago.

Quickly her companions made an emergency chair of willing arms and carried her up the short cut, directly to the side door of Altmount. Her tawny head rested against Trixy's shoulder, and it was Mary Mears who held Trixy's hand beneath the helpless form. Mary's face was alight and eager, her manner was quickened into expert generalship, and even the absorbing emergency did not prevent Trixy from noting this startling change. Then, there was jolly Pat gone off into hysteria, blaming herself for not being able to do anything else. Naturally Gloria had done the rescuing. Her childhood training at the water's edge in Barbend gave her skill, while her own instinctive courage provided the inspiration. The other girls were shouting, wailing, gasping and were otherwise "plain silly," so useless, so confusing, but Mary Mears, *she* was suddenly the executive.

"We'll have her around all right presently," she said calmly to Trixy. "Keep the girls back, Norma, we'll go straight up."

Within the house they laid Jack down, very flat, upon the floor, and again the girls were

banished, although the procession from the lake-side was loathe to disband.

Little Miss Taylor was too frightened to do more than approve of the efficiency shown by Trixy and Mary, and even the cynical Jean Engle looked on in unstinted admiration.

An hour later Jack lay on her own bed, blinking painfully.

"Wasn't I the goose——" she mumbled.

"No, indeed," replied Mary. "You were uncannily wise. If you hadn't slipped down, like a tired bird, into the safety of that nest when you felt the dizziness coming, you most certainly would have slipped overboard. But there's nothing to worry about now, you will be as fine as ever in a day or two."

"Mary," she whispered, "could I just speak to Gloria? I won't talk—long."

"Wouldn't I do?" Mary's voice was plaintive. She seemed so eager for the sick girl's confidence.

"If you don't mind, Mary, I want Gloria—to do something for me. She's so——"

"Oh, all right, I know. Of course," agreed Mary. "But Miss Taylor insists upon quiet until you have been looked over by the doctor."

Jack turned wearily upon her pillow, and at the mention of "doctor" a deep frown gathered upon her still pale face.

"It really isn't anything to be alarmed about," she sighed. "I was simply tired, went out for a bracer in the strong air, and somehow——"

"We know, dear," soothed Mary. "But with Miss Alton away, of course, Miss Taylor must be extra careful."

Her voice droned down to a lull, for the patient was dozing off as if from exhaustion. While Mary and Trixy were attending to Jack, another scene was being enacted down the corridor.

In Pat's room, where she insisted Gloria be taken, a rather noisy operation was being performed. The "rub down" being administered was vigorous to the point of violence.

"Leave me a hoof!" wailed Gloria. She was trying to retrieve "the hoof" Edna was working on.

"Think we ought to roll her?" suggested Blanche who had taken part in the other features of the reviving orgy.

"Just to show our appreciation," inserted Jean. The last of the pure alcohol was solemnly poured

over two refractory feet, the same being pinioned by Patsy, who held a useless basin beneath.

"Oh, now, girls!" begged little Ethel. "No fair! She's tired and warm as toast. Look at her cheeks!"

They were well worth looking at. As were Gloria's dark eyes, "shooting stars," according to a delighted little "freshie," Naomie, who managed to slip in during the excitement. And Gloria's head tied up in Pat's best silk banner, the red one, brother Tom sent from his school, gave the prostrate but by no means quiescent Gloria, a very spectacular appearance, indeed.

Finally, the alcohol exhausted and some of the practitioner strength along with it, Pat, the leader, called a halt. They had been rubbing, drying and according to the patient, bouncing Gloria around from pillow to cushion, and between times to the floor, for fully an hour, so delighted were they with the excitement, and determined to make a good job out of it, and the result was now a case of glow.

"Putting the 'glow' in Gloria," chuckled Pat. She was reacting from her frenzy of hysteria and would be at "concert pitch" for days to come.

"Let me up! Help! Don't smother me!

There! Where's my own duds?" begged the girl surrounded by "her admiring friends."

"Oh let's," lisped Ethel. "Let's put her in that glorious red robe."

"Say!" snapped Pat, "if you put any more glory in this bird she'll flutter off to paradise. I'm so glad my name's plain Pat."

Nevertheless, the red robe was being applied. Then, a pair of silly little satin mules, with gold tassels, were put on Gloria's feet, while an uncertain throne was erected among cushions from many adjacent rooms, and some further off down the hall. Thereon was installed the heroine.

"If I live to be a hundred I'll never forget it," declared Pat. "To see her come sailing in with poor Jack's petticoat at full mast——"

"Is she all right?" broke in Gloria. The surrounding mirth only followed an assurance of Jack's favorable condition, and even now a scout was kept busy running up and down the hall, reporting snatches of words or indications, surreptitiously gathered from the crack at Jack's door.

"Sleeping nicely," announced the outpost, Janet Thornton. "And the doctor's about due. Mary is still with her."

"Mary?" repeated Gloria.

"Yes. One more strange thing that has developed on top of the accident," explained Jean, who never missed the critical aspect of anything, "is the evolution of Mary. She's as wise as an owl, as quick as a wink and——"

"As strong as a lion," finished up Pat, smacking her lips gleefully.

"I always thought she was posing——"

But Jean got no further. She was wilted by the flash of the many condemning eyes.

"Be human, Jean," whispered Maud Hunter. "The idols are changing. Can't you see Glo, Trix and Mary are the new trio?" Maud was just human enough herself to enjoy the dethronement of Jean.

"What I can't fathom," returned Pat, who had propped herself up on Gloria's left and was now licking a home-made lollipop, "is why you dashed out, risking life and limb, after what seemed to be an empty canoe? Why, I ask you?"

"Just the sailor's instinct of rescuing anything helpless on the water," said Gloria quietly. "The canoe seemed to be having a good time but it couldn't make shore——"

"Comes of being born a hero! A real, natural

hero," interjected Edna. "I have always heard that the——"

"Needle of a mariner's compass always points north," paraphrased Janet. "Edna, we can't exactly build bon-fires and have parades until Jack is able to tell her story, so save some ammunition."

"Jack's story!" repeated Edna excitedly. "Oh, what a thrill that'll be!"

"Why?" interrupted Pat, immediately on the defensive. "Was there anything thrilling in going faint in a canoe?"

"But why the canoe?" This was from Jean in her most caustic tone.

"Why not the canoe?" flung back Gloria.

"In November?"

"Certainly, or in December if one cared to," Gloria slipped away from the most becoming cushion as she defended Jack. "For my part, I think water sports in the cooler weather lots more fun than in the broiling summer time."

"Uh-huh!" chanted Pat. "We see you do. Has that cake of ice melted off your left biceps yet?" A lunge at the biceps went after the answer. "Gloria Doane, star swimmer of Lake Manypeaks, champion rescuer of floating canoes,

and otherwise, notwithstanding and all the same, a fairish sort of girl——”

“Here, Pat, get your breath!” ordered Gloria forcibly, checking the flattering outburst. “We haven’t any more alcohol, and you’re too lumpy to rub easily.”

“Now, there,” choked Pat, “you spoiled my speech. I was going to say—— What on earth was I going to say?”

“You said it,” retorted Jean. “We were discussing the unusual procedure of canoeing in winter. Gloria was for it, you know, but then, Gloria is from a sea coast town, aren’t you?”

“If she hadn’t been, I just wonder when and how we would have found poor Jack?” That from Pat settled Jean’s attempt at the usual “country girl” slur. Gloria turned her head up regally, however, and a couple of sniffs from her sympathisers were aimed directly at Jean. Somehow Jean couldn’t stay good natured long enough to even encourage the mood.

A commotion in the hall brought every girl up alertly.

“The doctor’s come——” lisped Edna.

“Come? Just with Jack now?” asked Gloria.

"And gone," continued Edna, without a break in her voice.

"What did he say?"

"What's the matter?"

"Is she all right?"

"Can't we go in now?"

"Is Mary still on guard?"

"What's Trixy doing?"

"Has Alty come back?"

"Oh, say," protested Pat. "What is this, anyway? A spelling bee? Go ahead, Neddie. Tell us all you know and don't strangle under it."

"All I know is," went on Edna, panting from the importance of her message, "Mary came to the door and told the kitchen girl——"

"Her name is Tillie, Edna," volunteered Janet.

"All right. Mary told Tillie to fetch a hot foot bath——"

"Oh, maybe it's pneumonia."

"Shut up, Ethel. Go ahead, Ned," ordered Pat.

"I don't think it's pneumonia, for I heard Jack laugh——"

"Oh, they do sometimes," Gloria swallowed her own chuckle. "A laugh really isn't a serious symptom."

"Now, don't tease Edna when she's just pant-

ing with sheer exertion and trying to answer your silly questions," interceded Blanche. "If some of you had to duck in and out that hall, under doctor's bags, hot water bags, and steaming hot baths——"

But Edna was through. She knew when she was being teased and she hated it. Not another word could any one, even Gloria, coax or cajole out of her.

It was getting late, almost dark, and the excitement was now momentarily subsiding. In Jack's room Miss Taylor, Trixy and Mary were all trying to reconcile her to obey the doctor's orders.

"An overstrained heart," the gray haired man had pronounced the case, and "positive rest, no physical activities, not even prolonged walking" went with his directions.

Jack protested. She had had such spells before and always rebounded in a day or two. Why all the restriction?

When Trixy, over at a far end of the room, inadvertently heard Dr. Briggs ask what special effort had brought on the attack, she wondered about that early morning wild ride, down from Mount Major. But Jack had not admitted it, in

fact she replied to the doctor that nothing more than just "a played-out feeling" could have been responsible. And she had taken the canoe ride to brace up, she felt the need of strong currents of air, but they, evidently, were either too strong or she was too exhausted to do otherwise than "keel over."

When the doctor had gone and it was possible for her to get a word with Trixy, Jack managed to repeat the request she had made to Mary.

"I must speak with Gloria," she whispered, while Trixy smoothed a pillow. "Won't you fix it—for me?"

And Trixy nodded an unmistakable assent.

CHAPTER X

JACK'S STORY

As the real alarm subsided a tendency to withdraw "within themselves and gloat over the whole delicious thrill" (from Pat's pronouncement,) was shamefully evident.

Tests and exams furnished a reasonable excuse, so far as loyalty to Jack and the now idolized Gloria, was concerned, yet the interruptions imposed by some of the most studious and dependable, seemed to threaten traditions of Altmount and possibly shift the honors.

Gloria was determined to come out first in the English tests. Reading under her father's guidance from childhood, she had easily acquired an advantage over the average student, and she felt confident now that her essay would have a fair chance of winning first.

"To send it to dad! To have him read his own thoughts, as he used to give them to me!"

All his original ideas and his real pet theory of woodland relations! She was working hour after hour upon the theme, and it would be done in time. The contest would close in two days more and when tests were over there would still be time for some extra polishing.

Then Jack's accident interrupted.

And now, the evening after, Jack wanted to talk to her "all alone," Trixy said so.

"My own special thrill," she replied to Trixy. "But I do hope it will not be too secret to share with you—and Pat."

"And Mary," added Trixy. "You have no idea, Glo, what a girl Mary is. I'm going to invite her out to Sandford with me after exams are over. I believe we will have a week, and they houseclean while we are gone."

"Well, I'll run along to Jack," Gloria said. "Somehow I sort of hate——"

"Oh, you needn't worry that she'll gush over the heroic rescue," interrupted Trixy. "Jack is as sobered as if she had just dashed through the rapids. There is, plainly, something worrying her. I hope she won't transfer the worry to you, little girl," affection warmed the sentence, "for I'm just as proud and a bit more proud of you

than are any of the others. After all, you are my own special little Gloria." The flushed cheek was pressed with Trixy's eager lips and for a few moments they became again the chums they used to be, before Altmount, the fashionable boarding school, had imposed its estranging influence.

"Trix," breathed Gloria, "you do love me—a little?"

"A lot. Why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, you know, I can't forget Jean's idea of a country girl!"

"Queer you do forget mine." Another frank embrace from the "wonderful girl born to gentility" was bestowed upon Gloria. "But run along to Jack. We have posted signs to keep the coast clear, so improve the shining moments. And oh, Gloria," as her little friend attempted to leave, "be careful to agree with her if you possibly can. The doctor was none too sure of her condition."

"I'll promise everything but my one chum," said Gloria, "and neither Jack nor Mary can have her."

"Nor my little Glo girl, either," returned Trixy, still beaming her affection. "Somehow, I'll be rather glad to have her all to myself for

a little vacation. But aren't we 'crushy'?" laughed the older girl affecting a foolish pose.

"As if something threatened to separate us."

"Run along before I weep——"

"This time sure."

When the door closed Trixy went over to Gloria's dresser. As if reflecting, uncertainly, she opened the drawer and drew out a little Japanese basket. Removing the cover by its beaded tassel, she gazed upon the largest and most noticeable article within. It was the string of jade beads, sent anonymously to Gloria and which she had never worn.

"Could Jack have sent these?" she mused. "And yet——" A pause as she fingered the dull gray green necklace. "If they are really genuine they must be very valuable," she reflected. "And they must have belonged with the glittering trunk stuff that greeted Gloria's arrival."

She slipped the beads over her head and looked in the mirror.

"I'm glad I'm here with the little girl now," she decided. "I've always heard that the chief attraction at boarding school was the opportunity of meeting girls from all parts of the country, but now I'm inclined to think it is the opportunity

of meeting all kinds of girls! Heigh-o!" and the beads were slid back into the black Japanese basket with the coral beads and brass rings. "There, I wonder if my little black beauty will ever wear these?"

At Jack's door Gloria was listening. Miss Taylor was just about to leave and she greeted Gloria pleasantly.

"It's lovely of you to come and sit with her for a few minutes," she said, "because I know you are working so hard on exams. I heard what a fine outline you handed in to Miss Sanders."

"Thanks," said Gloria. "You know I love English, so it's a pleasure to work in Miss Sanders' class."

The little lady slipped away smiling. It was very evident she had faith in the work Gloria was doing, and her manner clearly implied it was very good work indeed.

But Jack was waiting.

"Gloria!" exclaimed Jack, before the girl just coming in had time to offer her own greeting. "Gloria Doane, my rescuer!"

"Bosh!" flushed Gloria, hating the flame in her cheeks. "I had the best swim ever. The best I've had since I came up here."

"Oh, I know. You're sure to duck compliments; all the same, you saved little Jack's useless life."

"You would have drifted in——"

"Not possibly. The wind cut straight for the falls, and queer thing—say, Glo," she broke off, "sit down, do. Right here beside the bed. I'm all set for a lot of whispering."

This was Jack. She smiled the twisted little quirk that pinched from the corners of her mouth, and her gray eyes showed some worth while glints in spite of the doctor's prescriptions.

"But a canoe is a safe floater, after all," insisted the modest Gloria. "You might even——"

"Have gone over the falls, and landed right side up with care. Hardly. However, I knew you were there, I almost knew you were coming, that is, I could feel rescue, and who, other than Gloria, would have come, so promptly?"

Gloria slipped into the chair with an air of passivity. She was not pretending to be modest, she felt foolish against the batter of a compliment as if it pricked her sense of duty, for, she reasoned, who would not have gone after that canoe just as she had done, if they felt as secure in the water as she always felt?

"And that icy cold!" again Jack recalled.

"I've often done it in winter, just to show off."

Jack beamed. Her admiration was no more pretense than was Gloria's modesty. The buttercup boudoir cap looked "sweet," on Jack, and her gray eyes were beginning to reflect the return of strength.

"Fancy my going off like that," she complained. "But I have a long story to tell you, Glowie, so I'd best brace up——"

"Don't, please, if you feel the effort," begged Gloria, actually fearful. "They say hearts are the trickiest things when they get on a rampage."

"I know. But I've got to tell you some things, Gloria. I just can't have my stepmother come here," began Jack with a brave effort. "She's all right, and as good as gold, when she isn't crossed; but these girls——"

"I know. I've felt the sting a little myself," admitted Gloria. "You see, I'm an out and out country girl, and green."

"So was Joan of Arc, and a beauty at that," broke in the sick girl. "Now, I'm willing to own up to a fraud, I do pretend a lot just for the fun of 'stringing' Jean and her crowd. They're such sillies." The scorn that surrounded the term

condoned its vulgarity. Gloria smiled her own acquiescence. Jack continued:

"I'll have to be very personal to make myself clear," she said. "My dad was a very rich man—a big business man." As she paused Gloria dismissed the term *Pirate's Daughter* as belonging to Jack. A big business man is hardly a pirate, that is not in the usual acceptance of the term. Therefore, that trunk full of possible loot could hardly have belonged to Jack. Neither could she have given Gloria the queer necklace. Somehow she, Gloria, was conscious of relief with the conviction.

"And he left me a lot of money," went on Jack, neither pride nor assurance tingeing the statement. "Well," she sighed, "you see, he married Steppy, sort of out of gratitude. She had nursed him through a dangerous fever, and she didn't save herself in the task either. Steppy is a trump, but you see—" A conscious pause. Then, "You see, she never had any chance of education and she has always associated with rough people, but even that can't hurt a kind heart, Gloria." This was a tribute and Gloria appreciated its value.

"Yes," she agreed, "a good kind heart doesn't

depend on circumstances nor upon education. Jane, she's my near-mother, she always said, kind hearts were all the angels left us when they 'shooed' us out of paradise."

"I guess so," sighed Jack, abstractedly. "But I'll have to hurry." A furtive glance at the door told why. "You see, when dad died he left my fortune" (she smiled) "all nicely done up and parcelled out so I could get a little package ever so often. And he gave Steppy all she will ever need. There's no trouble about that, but it seems, I should have told you at the beginning, that Steppy is a little queer, has ideas about buried treasures and all that. Why, I've seen her run up to a strange girl and ask her where she got her string of beads! Imagine, when the girl replied icily: 'In the ten cent store, but they're all gone.'"

Both laughed. Gloria wondered what the woman might ask her if she ever saw the smoky beads she secretly possessed.

"Well, you see," continued Jack, her cheeks now glowing with suppressed agitation, "Steppy insists dad had a buried treasure. It's too long and too foolish to go into, but I must explain that's why she comes down here and insists I go off with her, every now and again when she unearths

what she thinks is a clue. Isn't that really childish?"

"But she may have an intelligent reason for her belief," said Gloria, always eager to assist the suspected.

"That's it. Even our lawyer, (he's a fine young fellow, a friend of Miss Alton's,) even he has been deceived. She is so convincing. But now I guess we have dug the last hole. Our mountain place is as dug up as a ground mole farm. That was what played me out. We had to go by the mountain trail, and so of course, we rode."

"I see," said Gloria, recalling Trixy's story of having come upon the little rough rider troupe.

"Yes, I was determined to get back here today. It's a secret, Glo, but I do want to come out at least pretty good in the English contest. That's one branch I'm not stupid in and I have the darlingest lady aunty in Manchester, N. H. I want to show her that Broncho Billy, Jacky Corday has one civilized streak in her variegated make-up."

"Oh, I'm interested in the contest too," said Gloria, impulsively. "You see, I've got a dad. He's a darling man and quite a scientist, although he is in business. He often has articles on nature studies published in the magazines. And

I'm just crazy to show him what I can do. He's in the Philippines now, that's why I'm here."

"Oh, to have a dad! Mine was—a wonderful man." Gray eyes blinked and the soft voice fell to a cadence.

"Well, at any rate," chirped Gloria, endeavoring to bring the tempo up to normal, "I'll race you in the essay, Jack. How much have you finished?"

Followed a brief discussion of the contest, which was being conducted by the Forestry Association for pupils of private schools.

"It will close, you know, in two days more," said Jack warningly. "Do you suppose these old ladies around here will let me work tomorrow?"

"That might depend upon how well you rest tonight. I think I had better——"

"Oh, I haven't really told you what I especially wanted you for." Jack sat up straight and assumed the most confidential air. "I want you to phone, Steppy. Tell her you are my chum, and that you have just been talking to me, and I'm perfectly all right. "Oh, you know the bunk," (Jack was so like a boy at times,) "simply fix it so she won't cut down here and—and shock the gentle Jean."

"Pity about Jean. If I might advise, Jack, I'd just let Jean and her crowd—whistle!"

"If she only could! But can you see what a noise her lips would make? Whistle! It would be a sizzle. Jean's mouth is too sour to emit anything really jolly. But anyhow, Glo, I do hope you can forestall Steppy. Really, I couldn't hardly cope with her myself—just now."

"All right. I'll do my best," said Gloria taking the proffered phone number.

"I knew I could depend upon you, and you won't mind if I ask you to keep it all to yourself?"

"I wouldn't think of mentioning it." Then Gloria remembered Trixy's frank recital of the morning's encounter. How could she keep secret from her its sequel? As if Jack divined the thought she said quickly:

"Of course, you may tell Trix. She's a dear. And there's Mary, but I wouldn't care to have her know. Gloria, have you ever seen a girl with such a complete double personality as Mary?"

"I hadn't noticed. How do you mean?"

"Well, she acts as demure as a kitten, and she's —oh, I don't know how to express it, but she seemed like something done up in a case. Her real character doesn't show until some emergency pops up."

"Oh, yes. I know she was wonderful today."

said Gloria. "But then, a lot of the girls crawled out of their shells to take part in the circus!"

"Circus!" Did Jack wince or just appear puzzled?

"I mean the wild canoe chase with a real rescued maiden and a poor naked Indian half frozen. Oh, Jack! You missed the time of your life. You should have seen them rubbing me down!"

Jack laughed lightly and any possible "circus clouds" were instantly dispelled.

"Are you sure the old heart is behaving?" asked Gloria, now on her feet and ready to leave.

"Be-u-ti-fully. You see, there is one thing I can do and that's ride a horse. Wait until you see my Omar. He's simply a beauty. I won't say that he didn't fly over the hills this morning." A rueful little smile explained the result. "But I don't think that hurt my heart——" finished Jack.

"No, I don't either. You know, Jack, you have a weakness for walking the gym ceiling——"

"Well," a long drawn sigh, "if they'll just let me scratch with a fountain pen I'll be satisfied now. I've got a wonderful idea in my essay. You see—I've travelled a lot."

"I think I have quite a good idea too," said

Gloria. "I've never travelled far, but a day out of doors with my dad goes right into the heart of nature, and I've had that experience."

"Good luck, Glo, I can't win first, but I want to make a good showing. All the girls are keen on it."

"Yes." Gloria had heard nothing but contest for days and she also knew the interest prevalent. "I'll phone right away, or is this a good time?"

"Yes, I begged Miss Taylor not to write to Steppy till after supper so you will head her off. It will cost a couple of dollars to phone but don't forget I'm rich, horribly, disgustingly rich, I believe." After a pause Jack said, "and just reverse the charge, Steppy will love to pay it. Dad was always just as simple as—as any of his men, and I guess I can have a good time without putting on airs, myself." This was distinctly Jack, the pout, the quirked smile and the final smack of her rather boyish lips. "But do try, honey, to keep Steppy away. When I'm well I can restrain her, but caged up here, I can just imagine the girls waylaying her and she would be sure to give them the family history unabridged."

"I'll do my best," promised Gloria, getting out just in time to let Miss Taylor enter.

The office phone was not safe enough to use for the private message, so with Trixy and an evening walk as an excuse, Gloria started off for the village to telephone Mrs. Philip Corday concerning the condition of her stepdaughter, Jacquinot.

But Gloria had no conception of the enormity of the task assigned her.

Mrs. Corday was, by no means, an ordinary woman.

CHAPTER XI

A NEW ANGLE

THERE was no time to repeat to Trixy the story Jack had told Gloria, but the "high spots" could not be suppressed even temporarily so Gloria repeatedly told those on her way to the village.

"And that explains the riders' mystery," she commented. "You see this treasure business is supposed to be hidden in some wild mountain place."

"It is so like the usual silly yarn, with the prospect of some similar spectacular and impossible ending," replied Trixy, "that really, Glo, I could hardly work up interest in it. Can you?"

"Of course not," agreed Gloria promptly, "I'm not interested in the treasure hunt, but in Jack's predicament. She's a real little brick, Trixy. You should hear her stand up for this queer installment plan mother. I hope the ogress won't eat me up over the wire."

"Doesn't the treasure hunt sound a little like the Pirate's Daughter?" Trixy said, quizzically.

"Oh, I thought of that, and made more than one leading remark in its direction," admitted Gloria, "but I couldn't catch even a glimmer of suspicion. Not that I would disturb Jack about it now, but I can't help wanting to know who bestowed the black necklace upon me. I almost took the token in to our village jeweler for his opinion yesterday. But that must all wait now. Don't you really feel sorry for proud, high-strung Jack, Trix? I think I would feel exactly like her if I had to hide the weakness of some one I loved. I couldn't let others see it to scoff." The black eyes threw out threatening gleams and vouched promptly for the girl's loyalty to a friend in need.

"Yes, it is hard for Jack to manage that sort of person. I would rather do most anything than try to cover up relatives' shortcomings. They always crop out and spoil everything at the critical time," said Trixy.

"Yes." Gloria paused reflectively. Her father was a gentleman, always, Aunt Harriet, Hazel's mother was old fashioned but naturally polite; even Jane, though no relative and really only a nurse, was instinctively considerate. "Yes, it

must be humiliating for a girl to have to fight vulgarity," Gloria concluded.

"And you know, Trix," she continued, "Jack just jokes about her money. Says it is all done up in little prize packages so that she can use a week's or month's supply without counting it. Isn't that like Jack?"

"Exactly. But here we are. I'll wait for you at the soda counter. I want the joy of a soda undisturbed. I may have another with you while you swallow your favorite lime."

"Oh, there's Blanche, and Edna," Gloria grumbled, catching sight of a group of girls within the store.

"And worse yet, there's Jean. However did they all get out here so early?"

"Working hard on the essay, I suppose, so they came in early in order to have a long evening. Are you going in for it, Trix?"

"No, I'm too old and grown-up for prize essays," laughed Trix. "But I hope you'll win out. Of course you know that, Lambikins."

"I want to, for dad's sake," replied Gloria evenly. "and I really do love the subject. It's no trouble at all to write it."

"I imagine you would love it. Now slip into

the phone while I flag the others. Don't get excited and don't make any rash promises."

Ten minutes later Gloria emerged from the booth, her cheeks aflame and her eyes shining.

"Whew!" she whispered to Trixy. "That was some message. I'm not sure I succeeded in allaying Mrs. Corday's fears for Jack. Somehow she already had the news."

"Want a soda? You looked puffed out," commented Trixy, beckoning the clerk. "Take your time, Glo, the others have all gone. Just as you suspected, they are in for the prize. It seems Jean's mother is a Daughter of the Wars, and the Daughters, it also seems, are interested in the success of the contest. And harken! If you win the prize you may have cash or the especially struck off medal. You should have heard what the girls are going to buy for the cash consideration," Trixy enjoyed the joke.

"I suppose so," Gloria was fanning with the soda list and still panting. Presently she said, "Trixy, there is something queer about Jack's Steppy. I don't wonder Jack wants to keep her away from carping critics. She got so excited I thought she would short circuit the system."

Trixie laughed. "Then you are not sure you have forestalled her coming?"

"No, I'm not."

"It wouldn't do Jack any good to worry about her just now. The doctor told Miss Taylor that Jack was suffering from what is termed an athletic heart, and she must be kept quiet. He really insinuated her condition could easily become critical."

Gloria sipped her soda thoughtfully. She was still flushed and uncomfortable.

"But if she insists upon coming? There is no doubt of it she thinks the world of our Jack, and who can blame her for wanting a glimpse of the girl? What a shame she had to get the worst end of the news."

"Cheer up! Here's a letter, if you are calm enough to read it. Go right ahead, I have one I'll re-read. It's from dad. Yours has a favorite post mark, I noticed," said Trixy.

"From Jane. Dear old Jane!" exclaimed Gloria. "I'd just love to see her. Have I time to read this? I'll just glance through it——"

"Do." The business letter head was again drawn from the business envelope and Trixy smiled over every word as she re-read.

Gloria's face lit up like a blaze.

"Oh, she's coming! Jane is coming down to see me! Isn't that delicious! Janie, the calico lady! The only woman on earth who can wear a tight bonnet, strings under her chin and look pretty! She does. Trixy, I can just see her landing in Altmount. I hope she comes at recreation so every one sees her——"

Gloria was fairly dancing. Trixy had paid the check and they were ready to leave. The prim young lady clerk was smiling broadly.

"No danger of you wanting to hide your near-mother," remarked Trixy. "Perhaps Jack is too sensitive. Why should she so fear to have the girls see the woman?"

This was said as they struck the homeward stride. "Well, you see, Trix," replied Gloria, "she has some little kink in her mentality, and Jack says she knows she would blurt out the family history, unabridged, first thing."

"Oh," an emphatic pause drew out the single syllable until it included a quizzical sentence.

"You see, with Jack's money," Gloria quickly defended. But that didn't explain the fear of publishing the family history. "Really," she began again lamely, "you would think her fortune

was a joke. The way she speaks of it. I wouldn't wonder but she'll do some huge thing just to show the girls how mistaken they have been. But that isn't half as interesting as the coming of Jane!" Trixy's arm stood the battery of a powerful love squeeze just then.

"How is she coming?"

"Didn't say, but I hope by auto. I wouldn't know when to meet her. And let's hurry, Trix. I'll have to work until all hours to have a little time off tomorrow." They both quickened the already lively pace. "And of course," Gloria rattled on, "I'll have to tell Jack——Dear me! What shall I tell her?"

"The best yarn you can fix up. Remember that sick people sometimes need poison in medicine and—shall I say good healthy falsehoods are the same sort of mental antidote?"

"I see. Of course, I'll try to make her mind easy. But you know, Trix, I couldn't get the woman to say she would wait to hear when Jack might have a free day. She talked so much, so fast, so loud! My ears still tingle."

"Just tell Jack you fixed it all right——"

"And then set Sam to watch the trains! Trix,

if she ever comes what will happen to my essay? I have to retype it tomorrow."

"Don't worry, lamb, perhaps she won't come. I'd offer to watch for her and corral her, if necessary, but I have a test, in physics at that, and I've been plugging for nights on the stuff, but somehow I don't get the big idea."

"How about Mary? Suppose we could make her understand? Oh, but that wouldn't do either," Gloria hastened to correct. "I promised Jack to tell no one but you. She mentioned Mary's name but did not include her."

They were climbing the second hill in Altmount grounds, and the evening was in quite a hurry to finish up its duties, for already shadows were plunging into Night's canopy.

"I hope poor Jack is asleep," remarked Gloria. She showed real agitation now, as her task became more complicated.

"She may be asleep, for medicines often have that sort of secondary action. Glo, love, I'm glad I'm here now. It has been rather stupid after the wildly lovely times we had together out in the reckless world," she explained more fully, with a charming but most unworldly manner character-

istic of the real unspoiled girl, "and now," she continued, "you the little old reliable *you* that has bewitched me, have precipitated the most alluring episode of all, including pirate's daughter, hiding gem laden trunks, losing guilty blood stones and surreptitiously rewarding the poor but honest finder with a black jade necklace. Naturally, we're afraid the necklace is hoodooed, but I'm going to borrow it some day and find out."

"Glad I was able to inject a little variety into the solitude," murmured Gloria, "but as far as I am personally concerned, I'd like to thin it out right now. I didn't count on irate stepmothers shocking snobby school girls into fear of social contamination. There! see how my English has improved?"

"Marvelously! You'll surely win that prize——"

"And Jack is trying——"

"I know. I've been helping her a little——"

"Oh."

"You don't mind, Glo? I wouldn't help her against you. But she's pitifully weak on spelling, for instance. It's a strange thing that she should be so low in grade if she has always been—in such affluent circumstances."

"Yes. I don't think it's gossipy to remark on her lack of many things that usually come with money," said Gloria wisely. "All of which would point to sudden wealth."

"Or, perhaps, to some circumstance not compatible with wealth. Sometimes a big mill manager may really be rich and yet have to live in a horrible district," reasoned Trixy. Her own father was a manufacturer and a magnate, but their home in Sandford was the show place of the town. Yet Beatrix Travers was well versed in such limitations.

"I don't believe it is that," said Gloria. "It appears to me——"

"Oh, naturally it must fit in with all the other thrilling details." They were in the hallway, but no one seemed to be about. "Just as we thought they are—plugging," smiled Trixy. "I'll make a sign for our door while I wait for you. They might just come down on us for curiosity's sake."

Gloria tossed back a smile as she took the other corridor. In spite of her confidence with Trixy there was always a subtle something she could not find words to express. She knew, instinctively, that Jack had hidden more than she had divulged, she also knew that the sensitiveness could not ac-

count for such alarm as Jack had betrayed, therefore there was something definite Jack was bound to hide from her companions.

This line of reasoning was suddenly interrupted by Mary Mears almost colliding with Gloria on the turn near Jack's door.

"Oh!" both exclaimed.

"She's asleep," said Mary. "Did you get her mother on the wire?"

"Yes," murmured Gloria surprised that Mary should ask.

"Is she—satisfied to wait—until Jack is stronger?"

"I think so——"

"She was—excited?"

"Mary," whispered Gloria, drawing the girl into a nearby alcove. "Did Jack—tell you?"

"Yes and no," said Mary frankly. "But Gloria, I know something of Jack's anxiety and you need not fear you are divulging confidence. In fact, it is really more important for me to know if Mrs. Corday is coming here than it is for Jack."

"For you to know?" repeated Gloria, incredulously.

"Yes," said Mary decisively. "And if you know whether or not she is coming, Gloria, can't

you trust me far enough to let me know?" The voice and manner were subtly ingratiating.

"Certainly, Mary," promised Gloria, and the next moment she was in her own room holding her confused head in two unwilling hands.

"The waters gather," she groaned to Trixy.

"They rush along," finished the girl under the yellow lamp shade.

CHAPTER XII

A TRIBUTE

“BUT what could Mary mean?”

This question, or at least some variation of it had been Gloria's plaint for the better part of a half hour, and Trixy, still patient, offered another suggestion in answer.

“There is something strange about Mary,” she said this time. “I thought I noticed it first when she caught a glimpse of a family picture in Jack's room. It might have been imagination, we were all under such a strain, but it seemed to me her pale face betrayed sudden alarm.”

“A picture!”

“Yes. Just a rustic snapshot taken somewhere in the mountains. The stepmother, father and a couple of queer looking folks. I didn't scrutinize it but Mary took it to the light when she thought or appeared to think no one noticed. She had some motive for studying the picture.”

"Did she say anything about it?"

"Asked me if I knew who were in the group. Jack was dozing and Miss Taylor hovered near."

"I thought I had a first rate mystery in the Pirate's Daughter, with her blood stone and the gift of black pearls, but now here comes Mary moping along, with regular melodrama. Trixy, the plot—thick-ens! Am I or am I not the gur-rull from Barbend?" Gloria rolled down on the floor and kept rolling until the legs of the table stopped her. Then she lay flat, arms out straight and eyes closed. Trixy dropped a chocolate drop so near the receptive mouth it eventually rolled in.

"Oh, lovely-kins!" said the girl on the floor. "Why did I ever promise Dame Ambition that I'd try for that old prize? I feel like sleeping until the crack of doom."

"No wonder. You have had what might be honestly called, a full day. Get up on the couch and take forty winks. I'll shake you in time to finish that important page."

"Hark! I hear a footstep——"

"Quick! Up on the couch and I won't let them disturb you."

Roughly tucked in with the brilliant Navajo

blanket, Gloria squeezed her eyes closed before the door was opened to admit Pat.

"Is she asleep?" asked the red haired one, considerately.

"I hope so," whispered Trixy. "What a day she has had! Won't you come in, Pat?"

"Not if I would disturb her." A few carefully chosen steps brought Pat within reach of a chair. "They asked me to bring her this. Every one chipped in."

Gloria sat up straight. Her eyes beheld a glorious box that could contain nothing less sweet than candy.

"Oh!" she gurgled.

"Awake?" Pat's voice betrayed her hopes.

"I really wasn't asleep, but *who-all* sent me this? And why?"

"Why? Say, Glo, Mary tried to pawn her best ring to Janet for her share in the chipping. Mary always does use up her allowance in advance, but she was heartbroken not to have any real cash on hand. I mention it to show the spirit. Glo, we'll never one of us have a chance after this." Pat dug her sport shoes into the rug. "And to think I didn't even have sense enough to dip in, get wet and pretend I was for the rescue! Well,

anyways, as Tillie, the milk girl says, there's the token of our esteem, and we all hope it won't make you sick. Maud Hunter selected it and she is supposed to know what's what in candy, because her dad gambles in sugar or eggs or something sweetish."

Pat had ostentatiously placed the beautiful box in Gloria's outstretched hands and was salaaming absurdly.

Trixie beamed. "It was lovely of the girls——"

"And that little Ethel proposed it, she was so tickled to have helped rub your toes, Glo, or did she hold the soap? Anyways, she's so grateful to have had a hand in adjusting your precious person. And say, girls, how's Jack?"

"Sleeping, last we heard, and doing all right, we hope," replied Trixy. Gloria was fondling the gift appreciatively.

"She's a lucky stude. I thought it was all over, and I'll never forget her face. Honest." The tone was not now frivolous. "But say, Gloriosa, how goes the essay? I hear you're out to win?"

Even with the opportunity of banter made by Pat herself, Gloria couldn't find words to say "Run along! I've got to work to-night," instead she faltered:

"I'm afraid I've got an awful lot to do yet. And tomorrow may be a broken day."

"The girls working in the contest are to have a free day for it, didn't you know?"

"Yes, I knew that, but I expect company," said Gloria, still admiring the handsome candy box.

"Oh! May I meet him?"

"You may meet *her*. It's my near-mother, Jane Morgan. She has been with me all my life until last year and this," said Gloria gently. "And I'm willing to divulge this real secret, right here and now. Listen! I hope I shall be with her again before many more years, for my idea of a real life, is the thatched roof, with Jane and dad in the foreground and an ocean for a hedge."

"Lov-ell-lee!" thrilled Pat. "And, Glo, I don't expect you to open up the candy, so don't worry about an excuse. I'll toddle along. What report shall I make to the committee?"

"Oh, they're dears, every one of them, and you can tell them I said so. I wish I wasn't so busy. I'd invite them all in and we'd celebrate. But after all, perhaps it will be better to wait until we can fix something up for Jack. I'll save the prettiest pieces——"

"Hark! There's some one coming to make sure I brought it to you and didn't break the seal. Give me one little kiss in that clean spot below the freckle patch. Thanks, Glo dear, and if I live to be a hundred I'll never forget this day."

So little Pat bounced out in time to prevent the invasion of the approaching stepper.

"Even Jean," murmured Trixy, referring to the list of donors.

"But I couldn't trust her, for all of that," returned Gloria, frankly. "I think Jean respects popular opinion, and just now it seems to blow my way. But I wouldn't care to depend upon it for a night's lodging."

"Cynic," scolded Trixy. "You know, Glo, it's positively rash to fly in the face of popularity. But at any rate, sit down and write. You have a good hour left, and mayhap the diversion hath refreshed thee. Get thee to thy task, and may Minerva be kind."

From that time until the bell rang Trixy stalled off five attempts at intrusion, by actual count. It seemed that even an essay contest, keen though it was, would not hold down the curious ones.

Gloria soon forgot her own fatigue, however, in her interest of the subject, and what between

hunting up words, verifying vague beliefs in the great out doors, identifying queer little birds with downy whiskers over their eyes, (she had found one by the big oak tree, the queerest bird, that might have been a horned lark, but it was so young the marks could hardly be accepted as permanent,) these necessary interruptions rather delayed the actual progress of the last draft of the essay. But Gloria worked on, unconscious of draw-backs, enjoying the one task that befell her—original writing on the one original subject: Nature in The Great Outdoors.

"How come?" inquired Trixy, her own lamp already dimmed.

"Oh, I love it!" breathed Gloria. "The one trouble is, the theme is so unlimited, unrestricted. I believe one could write two thousand words on the life of a fern, it is all real, vivid and fascinating."

"Because you know all about ferns, and hop toads and daddy-long-legs," said Trixy. "Now, I would find it simpler to expand on the joy of home comforts. That's one thing first rate at Altmount. The beds are *swell!*"

"And I'll join you in similar praise directly," promised Gloria. "Meanwhile I'll drop the

curtain. There's no need of keeping you awake on my work."

"Well, you know I'd stay awake if it would do you any good, Glo. But like saying your prayers, essay writing, according to the rules, must be individually executed. What I did for Jack was just the roughest suggestion, of course."

"Poor Jack! I wonder if they'll let her finish it tomorrow?"

"Likely, if she rests well. Physical exertion is the main restriction."

Gloria was pondering, deeply, trying to fix up a difficult paragraph. Trixy heard her sigh and suggested:

"Sleep over it, Glo. If you go to sleep with the snarl on your mind, you will wake up with it all straightened out. Really. Psychologists say so. Be careful where you hide your candy. I might walk in my sleep."

"I wish the girls hadn't done it."

"Why?"

"Oh, sort of makes me feel foolish."

"Silly. You ought to be tickled to death. That's the loveliest box they had at Benwick's. And besides, I'm sure they wanted to show you how they felt."

"You mean that the country stigma has been condoned?" There was an even tone of mockery in this.

"Gloria Doane, you ought to be slapped." Trixy sat up straight to say this and Gloria was sitting on the foot of her chum's bed to rest up a little before trying to sleep. "You know perfectly well no one ever considered you—country."

"Queer what a morbid imagination I have. But never mind, lamb. 'S'all right. I know you love me and—and I hope I can send a good report to dad. What else counts? And Jane comes on the morrow! Whew! I'd best be haymaking, or whatever it is Pat calls getting to sleep. Trixy, don't you love little Pat?"

"Course."

"And isn't Mary quaint?"

"'Squaint?"

"Oh, go to sleep, dear, and don't let my alarm disturb you. I'm putting it under the big bowl right at my ear. Set for——"

But the monotonous breathing from the alcove made further explanation unnecessary.

In her own bed Gloria found sleep or did not find it within reach. Hours, it seemed, she lay there, thinking. She changed line and paragraph

of the essay over and over again, even snapping on her light to note some subtle phrase that might escape her memory during sleep, if sleep ever came.

Finally, anxious for rest, she deliberately turned her thoughts to Jack.

Why was she so fearful her stepmother would divulge family matters? What was so secret about it all?

"And she doesn't seem to know anything about the black pearls, or whatever the anonymous necklace is made of," she decided. That strain of thought travelled far before the weary girl checked it. Then the new angle, Mary's strange remark, came up for investigation.

"Could she have some secret interest in Jack?" Gloria questioned. "I always fancied she hovered over her, somehow, especially since that day in the dressing room when the girls openly discussed the loud spoken Steppy, who had taken Jack away so suddenly."

For some time vague fancies formed as explaining this sudden interest of Mary's. She remembered how outspoken Mary had been in Jack's defense. How she had asked more than one girl if she had seen the Steppy. But no one had.

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"And when Trixy came in from the ride," persisted Gloria's abused brain, "she thought she saw someone, who might be Mary, hiding back of the hedge, just as Jack and the other Rough Riders dashed in?"

"Now why——"

But a welcome confusion checked the answer and mercifully put Gloria's faith in the exact science of a well trained little alarm clock.

For a heavy day following was imminent.

CHAPTER XIII

SERIOUS SCHOOL WORK

BUT the alarm clock did not wake Gloria. There had been voices during the night, subdued yet distinctive enough to penetrate her consciousness, and now, although it was still dark, a slight commotion in the corridor startled Trixy as well as Gloria, and both were intently listening.

"What was it?"

"I think Jack must be worse. I heard a man's voice."

"Dear me. I hope not. Listen!"

"Yes, that's the doctor's voice. Oh Trix! If she should be worse!" Gloria's voice trembled with alarm.

"But it was to be expected that she might have another little spell. It wouldn't mean anything serious. Don't you get up. I'll slip on a robe and see if I can do anything," said Trixy.

"As if I could lie here——"

Then the sounds were lost in distant footsteps. The hall light that had shown through the transom was dimmed, and when Trixy opened the door everything seemed as usual.

"Wait. I'll slip downstairs. I think I heard Miss Alton's voice. She must have come in on the midnight."

"Don't stay. I'm just frightened to death, Trix. I had such a horrible dream."

Terror, unreasonable, seized Gloria. Perhaps as she said, it was merely the reflection of a bad dream, that indefinable gloom that so often follows a troubled night, especially when body and mind have been over exerted. But neither cause nor reason modified her dread that something serious might happen to Jack.

Quickly getting into slippers and gown she waited for Trixy to come back. It seemed a long wait, but was not actually more than a few minutes.

"Nothing to be frightened about. Just a little spell, as I thought, and Miss Alton called the doctor," was Trixy's verdict upon returning.

"Oh, I feel choked myself," confessed Gloria. "I've never been so silly before——" She fairly gasped. "Tell me honestly, Trix. They haven't taken her-away!"

"No. Certainly not. Go back to bed or you'll be ill yourself. Are you sure you haven't cold from that ice bath?"

"No-no. I'm all right, but sort of dazed. Isn't it silly? I wonder why I should flop like this?"

"I wonder why you shouldn't? Get back to bed, I'm boss now." Trixy seemed to mean what she was saying. "It is only six o'clock and you have an hour and a half more. Land knows, you need it." She tucked Gloria in, robe and all, although a little kick shook the blue slippers out and from the bed clothes.

"My teeth are—chat-ter-ring!"

"So I hear. Shall I get you a warm drink? Have you a chill?" Trixy asked, apprehensively.

"Oh, just common nerves. The kind I had when daddy went away—and I knew—I had to go to—Aunt Harriet's," stammered the girl, deep in pillows. "But do tell me? What did you hear? Please tell me all—you know?"

"If you aren't a real baby after all!" half scolded Trixy, sitting on the edge of the bed beside the shivering girl. "Well, all I know is that Tillie was sitting with Jack when she seemed to grow faint. Miss Alton was called and she called the

doctor. He said, Miss Alton told me, that Jack should be moved to a very quiet room and have a nurse installed. That's lots nicer than being carried off to some rubber tired sanitarium."

"Oh yes, lots."

"I don't suppose you can get to sleep again?"

"No, I'm sure I can't."

"Then just keep warm, and forget the bad dream. I often have them myself and they seem so real I'm a wreck the whole next day. My favorite is a horrible bloody murder with my hands dripping gore. Though I don't do the murder I always get mixed up in gore. Last time I found it was Mabel's fudge that hadn't been entirely washed from my guilty fingers as we turned out lights to fool Wilson."

Gloria managed a feeble laugh. "I know what gave me the sudden fright," she said, now more quietly settled and almost free from the signs of alarm. "I was just dreaming horribly that Jack called and I couldn't go to her. Night-marish, you know, then I actually did hear voices in the hall and it made the thing so real."

"And what really caused it was the repressed fear you did experience when you saw Jack in the bottom of the canoe. While you were awake you

threw it off, but it bobbed up serenely in sleep. Well, you're all right now, Jack is all right so far as danger goes, but what threatens you as something really not all right is the busy day on the essay. Keep your eyes shut. There," she held her finger tips over Gloria's fluttering lids, "and if you can't really sleep you can rest. I'll go and do likewise."

But even the eyelids rebelled after a time, and quickly as she felt at liberty to do so, Gloria jumped up, made for the showers, then spent fifteen minutes in vigorous exercise.

"More like it," she exclaimed, when dressing for the free day, in such apparel as might be worn indoors or out.

During breakfast and after, the whole place was a-buzz with queries and opinions concerning Jack. Some insisted the Steppy had come again and carried her off, "sick and all," others heard the voices and knew Jack must be "almost dying and maybe had to make her will." Pat said she was rich enough to have something to will, and while she, Pat, was very hard up at the moment, she hoped magnanimously that Jack would live long enough to spend her own money. The little joke went by unappreciated.

Mary Mears did not appear in the dining room. Her absence was commented upon, but Edna Hobbs passed the word that Mary would not leave Jack's bedside, and that Miss Alton had given permission for her to remain.

All of which might or might not have been authentic, but served, at any rate, to keep interest keen and liven things up generally.

Again Gloria was surrounded by admiring ones, especially the younger girls looked upon her as a real dramatic heroine, and even the box of candy, for which she now thanked them personally, had not, they declared, fully expressed the admiration rampant.

Finally, classes were due, students scattered, and those free for the essay finish dove into secluded corners, hugging hopes and strangling misgivings.

Gloria had only a few pages to correct, then she would pass it in to Miss Sanders and it would be ready for typing. She gathered her papers and her reference books, concentrating upon the important of elusive phrases, and had just begun to write when Maggie, the maid, poked her head in the door and set forth a summons to the office.

"She wants you, right off, at the office," said

Maggie, brushing back a "cowlick," reminiscently.

"All right, I'll go at once," agreed Gloria, putting her petrified wood paper weight upon the precious essay. Her dad had sent that weight to her, all the way from the Philippines, and she always felt it was the nearest thing to his own personal influence that she could exert.

In the office she found Miss Alton, as sweetly impressive as usual, and she politely inquired after Gloria's own affairs before divulging the purport of her summons.

"And I've heard all about your bravery," she smiled. "The girls are simply inspired by your heroism——"

"Oh, it was scarcely worth all the fuss that has been made——"

"I know. To the brave all else is puny," said the principal. "Nevertheless, it is gratifying for me to know I have such a splendid lieutenant to stand by my officers during my absence."

Gloria smiled tolerantly. She was thinking of that sentence she had been just about to indite when Maggie called. She looked up questioningly.

"What I sent for you for," responded Miss Alton, "was to ask your help again. It seems little

Jacquinot has implicit faith in your discretion, and she has, has she not, intrusted to you a message she wished sent to her mother?"

"Yes. I talked with Mrs. Corday on the wire," replied Gloria, "but Jack was sleeping when I returned—"

"I understand. That was entirely right. You had no need, really, to report to the office, although as a rule, it is best to do so. Under the circumstances, and in consideration of your excited state of mind it was entirely excusable——"

"What, Miss Alton?" The tone and words implied some mistake of which Gloria was unconscious.

"Why, my dear, it would have been better for you to have consulted Miss Taylor before delivering an important message from a sick girl."

Gloria's face flamed—but only for a moment. The next she knew she had borne out Jack's wishes and that she did so in ignorance of a school rule, or an unwritten point of ethics was not, she felt sure, to be seriously considered. She just wished Miss Alton would let her get back to her work.

"But now that you have been unwittingly made an emissary," Miss Alton's smile was real, "it seems best to continue in that capacity. Jacquinot,

as you may know, is still extremely nervous, and the doctor, who called early," (unnecessary alarm was always to be avoided at boarding school,) "ordered absolute quiet for some time. Now, I have just received a message from Mrs. Corday. She insisted upon coming after all. Miss Taylor, who has great faith in your resourcefulness, has suggested that you meet the train, and perhaps in some magical way you could turn her back. If she comes up here we shall certainly have a difficult time in keeping her away from little Jack. She may even question our motives." Miss Alton allowed a very human frown to gather upon her benign brow. "But what ever happens she cannot see Jack. She always excites her."

"I'll do anything I can, of course, Miss Alton," said Gloria, each word sounding to her like a blast at the belated essay.

"You have today free? You are in the contest?"

"Yes, but not finished. I have been delayed." There was no keeping anxiety out of her voice.

"Have you much to do? I would not have you held back in your work for any private matter," said Miss Alton quickly. "Especially as I know how interested your father is in your writing, and

I also know what good reports Miss Sanders already has of your work; but if you could just meet the ten o'clock train, and in your own original way soothe Mrs. Corday, or in some way assure her of Jack's satisfactory condition, then, if she must come, perhaps it would be easier for us all." A sort of resigned helplessness was now apparent in Miss Alton's manner. "But after all," she added, "I can't see why I should ask you to do this. It is only because we all here seem somehow to antagonize Mrs. Corday, in spite of our very best intentions. She is—rather erratic, but perfectly devoted to little Jack," declared Miss Alton, warmly.

Gloria prepared to leave. Indecision was disturbing Miss Alton. Then Gloria said:

"I expect a friend on that same train, Miss Alton. You know Jane, my old nurse, has not been here yet. I had word yesterday that she is coming today, so when I meet her it will be quite easy for me to pick up Mrs. Corday. How shall I recognize her?"

"She will be sure to hop into the yellow and black taxi. I say 'hop' for Mrs. Corday is extremely alert. She is positively the most active

middle aged woman I have ever known. But her training——” Miss Alton stopped suddenly. She had no need, evidently, to discourse upon the obstreperous stepmother’s training. “But,” she added presently, “it will simplify matter greatly, if you can just meet the train. We shall have to depend upon conciliatory circumstances to attend to the rest. Thank you, dear, and I know I can count upon your discretion.”

A sense of impending gloom gripped Gloria. She felt as if her heart had slipped off a ledge into a pool of thick, murky stuff that it couldn’t beat its way through. She dreaded taking the temperamental woman in hand even temporarily; she longed to have Jane all to herself for a few hours, and she was positively feverish in her anxiety for finishing the essay.

Now, all these hopes must be subservient to Miss Alton’s wishes. But if it saved Jack——

“Be sure to tell me if this little commission interferes with any personal plans,” Miss Alton said at the door, thereby robbing Gloria of even the slight comfort to be had in a rebellious groan. As if she could tell her? And as if she could now complain loudly and thoroughly to Trixy!

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She left the office indifferently. So much so that she totally disregarded traffic rules, and with head bent out of the line of vision she ran directly into Mary Mears.

CHAPTER XIV

BALKED AMBITION

THE surprise of meeting Mary Mears so suddenly almost took Gloria's breath away.

"Oh, excuse me, Mary," she faltered. "Glad you weren't a lamp post."

"So am I," said Mary. "But, Gloria, can I speak to you a moment?"

"Mercy me! More plots!" Gloria was cynical in her despair. "Certainly you can talk to me. I need sympathy. Have you any to spare?"

But Mary was not in Gloria's mood. Quietly she led her into her own room—a rare thing for Mary to do.

"You know, of course," she began, "Jack is worse?"

"Just the expected reaction, I thought. Isn't it?"

"I hope that is all. And—is—her stepmother coming?" It seemed actually difficult for Mary to ask the question.

"I believe so. That is, if I can't flag her away," said Gloria, a little bitterly.

"It is a queer situation," Mary hesitated. Then, "But I can understand, perhaps better—than the others," she faltered.

"Why don't you meet her, Mary? I'm sure she would listen to reason from you," blurted out Gloria.

"*I!*" the word ran the entire scale of surprise. "Why, *I* wouldn't want to meet Mrs. Corday under any circumstances."

"Is she an ogre? May I have my precious head bitten off? Why all this alarm?"

Evidently Mary regretted her quick reply, and now she tried to qualify.

"That was a queer thing for me to say," she smiled, "but you know, I do hate—to meet strangers."

"So do I, when I'm due to finish essays, meet dear Jane and otherwise merrily pass away the alleged free day." Gloria tilted her head up characteristically.

"But I just wanted to know about the trains?" Mary demurred.

"Going away?"

"Only for the day. I had a business message

this morning. My time table may be out of date," she attempted to explain. "I believe they change schedules in October or is it November? Well, anyway I imagined you would know. When does the train come in and when does one go out?"

Gloria burst into a frank little laugh.

"Which way do you want to go?" she asked. "Not thinking of going up to the back woods junction?"

"Oh, no. I'm going into Blairton. But I supposed you were going down to meet the incoming train." A flush of confusion spread over Mary's fair skin.

For the moment Gloria showed her own perplexity. What, really, did Mary wish to know?

"Oh, do you want to go in when I go?" she asked.

"Why, I thought I could see about connections. Do you know what train Mrs. Corday is coming on?" Mary asked directly. And then Gloria guessed. Mary wanted to avoid being at the station when Mrs. Corday came!

"No, I don't exactly," replied Gloria truthfully.

"I thought perhaps Miss Alton told you."

What had seemed like confusion in Mary's expression was fast gathering into misery. She was plainly intent upon keeping out of the way of Jack's unpopular stepmother.

"There are two trains in," began Gloria. "And I suppose if she doesn't come in on one, Jane will, and ten chances to one I'll have to meet both. Mary, I'm sure as shooting, that my poor little essay is going to be stalled 'on the high rocks of a crowded day.' "

"Oh, Gloria! You don't mean you can't finish it?"

"No, I don't quite mean it, but I fear it. There have simply been endless interruptions——"

"And now I've detained you, and on such a silly pretext. Of course, I might have phoned about the trains."

"I was glad to call," smiled Gloria sweetly, for she guessed what ever Mary's anxiety might have been caused by, it must be something more serious than finishing a prize essay.

"I most sincerely hope you will have it finished in time," said Mary, warmly. "I only wish I could enter more heartily into school work."

"I can't truthfully say I love all of it," ad-

mitted Gloria, "but I have always been interested in trying to write. You see, my dad does some writing although he is in business."

"I suppose one must inherit that sort of thing," replied Mary wistfully.

"Every one has her own talent," said Gloria hopefully. "If you don't like writing you may like——"

"Nursing. I did love to nurse little Jack. But then, you see, my own dear mother—only lately died." Mary turned away, biting her lip.

Instantly Gloria's irritation gave way to sympathy. To lose a mother! And perhaps one who was a real companion!

"Mine is gone also, Mary," she said very gently, "but it wasn't so bad for me. I was very young and I have always had dad."

"My father is far away. I barely remember him, although he attends, through his lawyers, to my every need. He is very generous but also very remote. I might have gone with him or stayed with mother. Naturally I stayed with mother."

"Was she ill long?" Gloria asked kindly.

"One year. But in that time we were together and even her illness seemed less to me than the

continuous separation we had been having through her—profession." This last word was hesitantly chosen.

"I hope you feel we are all as friendly as we really want to be, Mary," Gloria said, moving away, "and if you feel like having a good old fashioned chat, drop into our room, won't you? We are the champion chatterers of the house. I must run along. Call me if you want to go to the station when I'm going. I should think that would be in about three quarters of an hour. Meanwhile I'll go at the essay once more. If you see Jack this morning, give her my love. I suppose we will be debarred for the present."

"No more company, is the order," said Mary. "Thank you, Gloria, for your—confidence. You see, sometimes we cannot be as confidential as we might like to be. I have always longed for, yet dreaded boarding school, and now—I wonder!" She brought her lips together in a half smile and at the moment Gloria could not help noticing how pretty she was.

Hurrying back to the expectant essay, Gloria kept wondering how Mary would look in a dainty pink, and amethyst lavender or a soft green frock.

"With her skin and hair she ought to look angelic," was her final decision.

Trixie was gone from the room when Gloria returned. This morning all the girls were bent upon tests or preparations for them. With something like real affection Gloria picked up the unfinished pages of her theme. She scarcely felt the time passing until the half hour struck on the big hall clock. A few more words, just a better one here or there, then a hurried scanning, and she reluctantly dropped her pen on the glass tray.

"Hope I can get back before noon," she was thinking. "I can easily dispose of Jane for an hour. She's such an understanding dear." This thought was very satisfying and created a happy smile. "And one good hour more will surely clean up the effort! Just for dad's sake I do so want it to be creditable," Gloria was thinking. Then the necessary haste forced itself upon her.

Meeting Jane for the first time since she had been at Altmount meant fixing up, and having the day free from classes meant the opportunity of wearing regular, not uniform, garb. Gloria quickly selected her bright red "sleeveless," and this over a simple white blouse would be sure, she knew, to please Jane.

But the neck needed a red tie. She looked for one in both top drawers but none came to light."

"A pin, oh, I know!" she almost exclaimed aloud, "I'll wear the little dark stone necklace. It will go just right with this red garb."

No need to hunt for that; it always lay safely in Trixy's little box and from that receptacle in the corner of the drawer, Gloria now brought it forth.

"The first time," she reflected. "Too bad Trixy isn't in to help me with the ceremony." The chain was fastened with a small circular clasp and this did not yield readily to her finger pressure. After a few attempts, however, the clasp opened and then she promptly snapped it shut, and for the briefest moment gazed in her mirror.

"Sort of pretty," Gloria concluded. "Odd, at any rate." She straightened the slender string of dark stones, and allowed them to lay flat against her throat. "Jane always loved beads around my neck," she further reflected. "I hope she will like these as well as she did the little blue and white ones she so hated to have me give up."

A glance at the small clock warned her the train would be due in fifteen minutes, and that

meant to call to Sam to take her to the station, in a very small and very humble type of automobile; that he always called "his team." Sam would be sure to "stick around" hoping for passengers in such a plight as Gloria found herself.

"Hop right in," he answered, cranking as he talked. "This here little team comes in right handy on a day like this. I jest took the little pale girl down."

"Oh, I forgot I promised to call for Miss Mears," Gloria told the man now climbing over the wheel.

"Ain't no need. She's went. I took her for the ten five. Land sakes! What a bustle she was in! 'Tain't none of my affairs, but if I was to say anythin' I'd jest about guess that little girl has somethin' frettin' her mind."

He was rattling along and shouting vigorously to send his high pitched voice still higher, in order to make sure that his remarks reached the solitary passenger behind him. Gloria was discreet enough to make no comment. Sam was never to be encouraged in anything like criticism, and although she would have loved to know why Mary had dashed for the earlier train, she said not a word to provoke further comment.

Sam subsided. For a considerable distance he merely groaned or grunted as the car hit the high spots, then finally, just as the rattle box bounced over a big "thank-e-mum" he shouted back at his fare:

"Is she sickly?"

"Why, no. I don't think so," replied Gloria grudgingly. It would have been silly for her to ask, who?

"She's so sort of unnatural like," squeaked Sam. "Al'lus goin' out before folks is up and she's so white in face and black in—figger," this was a long and labored speech. "'Course I ain't supposed to criterize, but I know a case when I see one!"

"A case?" The question was defensive.

"Sure thing. She's a case. Mind the day I fetched the wrong trunk to your room? Well, here we are. I never noticed the run. This little team can go, 'specially when a feller's interested," Sam chuckled without apology.

"What about the day you brought the trunks?" Gloria asked, although she had to follow Sam around the car to do so.

"Oh, yes, I was sayin'," he took off his old beaver hat and ran his fingers through his shaggy hair. "You see, there was a lot of trunks a lot

alike and it was some mixup. There's a feller that'll want to ride back. You goin' to the city?"

"No. But don't wait for me, I'll have to take Dave's car back. I expect company." An extra dime dropped into his hand with the regular fare appeased the man's jealousy. Dave's car was the regular big taxi, a chariot of a fine make gone into the livery business, as a good horse eventually may go to draying.

The train was not in, neither had the signal dropped an arm to indicate its coming, so Gloria had time to get her breath and ponder upon Sam's gossip.

"There were other trunks like mine, I know Pat's was identical," she considered, "and I suppose the girls pointed out to Sam which one each thought was her own. Mary might have been one of the number."

Two young women blustered into the small station. They were Altmount pupils, Gloria recognized, but she was not acquainted with either. Taking no notice of her, they "fan-fared" the ticket agent then dropped into a seat near Gloria but which was concealed from her by a high backed bench.

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"Of course, mother'll howl," said one, "but to be perfectly honest, I'm glad to escape."

"Lot's better to leave this way than to be dropped," joined in the other, although her voice lacked sincerity.

"I never expected to stick it out past the first term," continued the first speaker, "but having been at boarding school——"

"Yes, the home folks were keen on that. But, Miriam, I'm afraid I'll just have to go back to prep. You see, I really did lose an awful lot of time."

Gloria felt like a thief of their confidence, so she got up noisily and walked to the window.

The signal dropped, the train whistled and her heart jumped.

If only Mrs. Corday would not come, and if only Jane would be sure to come!

"What's an essay alongside of my Jane?" she asked herself, just as the train rumbled in.

CHAPTER XV

STEPPY AND THE CLUE

JANE came! Smartly she stepped down from the car steps only smiling at the conductor's proffered hand. Then, she had Gloria in her arm's in spite of the baggage man's push cart heading straight for her, and although Gloria couldn't see past Jane's bonnet she could hear very distinctly. Mr. Thorpe, who had pushed that cart to and from trains for years and years, was an intolerant, irascible old man. But this time he was forced to turn out. The embracing pair cared nothing for his unreasonable orders.

"Jane! Janey! Janikins!" breathed Gloria into the bonnet strings. "How crazy I am to see you! You look—wonderful!"

"My Glory girl!" replied the woman uncertainly. "I felt as if you had gone to foreign fields with your father. It has been the longest time——"

"Come over here a moment," Gloria interrupted. "I have to look—for—someone else." She was inspecting the few arrivals as she said this, but no potential Mrs. Corday loomed up.

A great gulp of relief almost choked the girl. She looked again, more critically.

"I guess she—didn't come!"

"Some friend?" asked Jane, with a polite interest.

"No. That is she is the mother or stepmother of a friend. One of the girls is sick and I was commissioned to meet the mother." Each word was clipped off and stood up straight as a spike, without so much as leaning one tone upon another.

"Very sick?" Jane mistook distaste for anxiety.

"I had better make sure she didn't come," continued Gloria. "There's a Pullman. She might have been on that."

"Run right along, child, and attend to your errand," said Jane. "I'll go in the waiting room and straighten my bonnet—if there's a glass."

The porter was just picking up the stepping down bench when Gloria turned toward the parlor car. Between her and that point Mr. Thorpe now trundled the big baggage cart, but still, a

person could be seen coming toward the station if one such there might have been.

That she had not come seemed almost too good to be true. It was, for just at the side of the station, where Dave's taxi stood, Gloria beheld a strange woman.

She was talking excitedly to Dave. The next moment she would be in his car!

"That's she!" said Gloria aloud, turning instantly toward the street side of the station.

Dave opened the taxi door, the woman put up one foot—

"Dave!" called Gloria shrilly. "Wait a minute!"

"All full up!" he flung back. The woman was now spreading herself on the spacious back seat.

"Wait!" shouted Gloria. "I—want—you!"

Her anxiety to stop him shaded her first fears. She rushed up to the car, prepared even to jump on the running board did he attempt to start before she could speak.

But the veteran driver, rival of Sam, and open enemy of George Thorpe, recognized excitement when he saw it, and he stopped with his hand on the wheel and his foot over the "gas."

Gloria was abreast of the car. She could see the passenger, and noticed her impatience to start.

"Well?" asked Dave. "What kin I do fer you?"

"I came to meet Mrs. Corday," replied Gloria. "I thought perhaps this may be she."

Dave turned and bestowed a questioning look at the woman within the limousine. Evidently the lady had heard Gloria's statement for she smiled and looked out quite sociably. Quickly Gloria followed up the opportunity through the open door.

"Why, yes. I'm Mrs. Corday," repeated the woman pleasantly.

Her first impression was favorable, and in acknowledgement of it Gloria smiled her bravest.

"Oh, I've been sent to meet you," she said. "Would you mind stepping out again? I have another friend, just arrived?"

The gorgeous beaded bag was picked up from the seat, and the woman in the Burgundy tailor-made suit, squirrel collared, and with the elaborate hat all plumes and flotsam, easily stepped over a small leather bag and descended to the tar walk.

Dave "looked daggers" at Gloria, but she

wasn't looking his way. She was, instead, thanking her lucky stars that the much dreaded Steppy, was, after all, no worse than an unnatural blonde, over dressed and over affable.

"My dear! You came to meet me?" she gushed. "Wasn't that sweet of you? You're a friend of little Jacquinot's, of course?"

The unexpected, but welcome, amiability almost overwhelmed Gloria, but she remembered her lines.

"Let's go into the waiting room," she suggested. "My friend is in there. Dave, wait, if you wish. I suppose we will be going up presently three of us." This prospect conciliated Dave, for he wagged his head pleasantly.

"Oh, he must not go," declared the stranger. "There is not another taxi around, and I know what it is to be stranded in a place like this. Tell me, dear, how is my little Jackie?"

"Better," said Gloria. "She only seems to need quiet and rest." They were entering the station and Jane stood waiting, beside the big round stove. "There is my friend," said Gloria, leading up to Jane. "Jane, this is Mrs. Corday, the mother of one of my chums. Mrs. Corday, this is my near-mother, Miss Morgan."

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"Near-mother? How quaint! I'm a near-mother myself——"

"Jane has been my friend-nurse since I was a tiny tot," Gloria hastened to interject, lest some real, personal complication might arise. "My mother died when I was a baby. I'm Gloria Doane."

"Gloria! *The* Gloria! About whom Jack continually raves," replied Mrs. Corday. "Do let us sit down a moment and get acquainted. No chance for anything so human up at that horrid school."

This exactly suited Gloria. She would be able to detain Mrs. Corday without using any of the strategy she had been so feverishly concocting.

They arranged themselves on the bench under the high window. Jane appeared perfectly content, (Jane would,) and the strange woman, who looked startlingly out of place in the humble station, had the grace to affect ease, whether or not she felt it. Gloria focussed a smile and held it.

"Now, dear," began Mrs. Corday, "don't mind if I'm impatient, but I must hear all about darling Jack. You are the very girl who was with her on the lake when she fell ill, are you not? I couldn't mistake the name——"

"Yes, I was with her," interrupted Gloria, "but she just had a little spell; the doctor said she must have over exerted herself. You know how fond of athletics Jack is."

"Do I not?" A full breath volleyed forth each word, but the strident voice, the girls had complained of, was not noticeable. "Since she was a tiny tot no one could hold Jack down. You see, I have been with the Corday family for years," the statement was prideful, "and I knew the little girl's mother very well. I travelled with them always. Whenever there was some new feature to be tried out I was one of those selected to express an opinion upon it." Gloria wondered, but continued to listen. "Yes," sighed the very modern, very middle aged and very stylish woman. "Yes, there were few on the road who could surpass Philip Corday in special attractions. But go ahead, dear, what about our little girl?"

Jane was interested to the point of abstraction. She didn't even re-tie her bonnet strings, and she sat back, listening comfortably.

"A plunge and it's over with," thought Gloria. Further delay might only irritate.

"You see, Mrs. Corday," she began bravely,

"Jack asked me to phone you last night, as she hated the idea of having you come up when she would not be allowed to talk freely to you——"

"She would. The dear. She and I understand each other perfectly." This was addressed to Jane. "But I had to come. Her father left her in my keeping, and a lot of silly young lawyers have been trying to get her away from me—Go ahead dear. I ramble like the butcher in the old song. Or was it the butcher who cut him down?" A quizzical smile spread over the water colored features.

"Personally I believe Miss Alton is the best intentioned woman possible," Gloria said next, without having the slightest idea why she said it. "But the doctor's orders have to be followed, and you know how responsible boarding school directors feel themselves to be," she urged.

"I do, indeed. That's why I have a scrap every earthly time I go there. They boss me around as if I hadn't been a boss myself, all my life." Her look of seething indignation included a "go ahead" for Gloria.

"Then, Jack thought if I could meet you and explain all this——"

"And mighty kind it was of you, you having company yourself——" Mrs. Corday arose, premonitorily.

"I'd do anything I could for Jack——"

"You risked your life for her, they told me." One tailor-fitted arm went around Gloria's shoulder, "and we're not forgetting it. Is that hackman out there yet?"

Every one turned and looked out.

"Oh, yes. Dave will wait," promised Gloria, feeling for the moment a sense of helplessness. She had made no progress in diverting Mrs. Corday. She was determined to go to the Hall. And she was as sure as ever "to scrap" with those who might interfere. That would mean failure, for Gloria to really help Jack or Miss Alton. Her resourcefulness was fading. Her head was almost achey, and her temper not slumbering. She wanted to be off with Jane. Why not let Miss Alton use her own talent in smoothing over the emergency? In fact, Gloria began to reason, why shouldn't this woman have a talk with her stepdaughter? She was, by no means, the disturber she had been blamed for being, if appearances could be trusted.

Then came the memory of Jack's plea. There must be a good reason and this need not be apparent to strangers. Mrs. Corday was showing her own impatience.

"Don't mind if I run along, dear," she said. "I must get back to the city by noon. I have very large interests to manage, very large." She swept humble Jane with a look of business magnitude.

Gloria's hopes were oozing out at her finger tips. She must make one final effort.

"I wondered if you wouldn't just visit with me, this time," she suggested sweetly. "Then if Jack can see you——"

"If she *can* see me! Of course she can see me! Nothing serious has happened!" A new alarm spring went off with a snap. Gloria laid a trembling hand upon the pearl kid glove.

"But you really wouldn't go against the doctor's orders? You know what a simple headache can do if one gets excited; and Jack would have so many things to tell you." Gloria's wistfulness was very becoming. Mrs. Corday turned back from the door. Jane took a hand in the plot, innocently.

"Indeed," she said, "this girl herself can work up quite a tempest when anything crosses her, and I've had some little experience with tantrum headaches——"

"Jane!"

"Oh, I mean it, Gloria. You were no lamb to bring up."

"Same way with our Jack. She was as headstrong as a little mule. And she always could, as you say, Miss Morgan, work up a tantrum headache." A heavy sigh betrayed troubled memories. "Suppose we just go along up and feel out which way the land lies?"

"Yes, of course, that's what I meant," floundered Gloria. The small room was excessively warm, and the round pot stove like a red flannel petticoat blown out by the explosive heat. Gloria's coat had been hanging loosely from her shoulders and she now shifted it to place. As she did so the little, strange dark necklace caught fast in the hangerribbon at the back, and she tugged at it a moment, trying to release it.

"Can I help you?" asked Jane putting her hand up to the offending trinket.

"Oh, no, thanks," replied Gloria. "The catch

of this necklace—sticks.” She gave it a vigorous tug and with a clattering rattle the beads fell at her feet.

“Oh, I hope I didn’t break it,” she exclaimed. “It’s something new.” Mrs. Corday was looking inquiringly, so Gloria held it towards her!

“Let—me—see!” almost gasped the woman, bending over to scrutinize the necklace. “Where ever did you get that?”

“It was given me,” replied Gloria. She could not say by whom.

“When? Where, child, did you get that necklace!”

Jane drew up beside Gloria protectingly.

Gloria was visibly embarrassed. She looked from the mysterious beads into the woman’s flushed face.

“We had a—sort of game,” she stammered, “and this was the forfeit. I do not know who gave it to me.”

Speechless with excitement Mrs. Corday assumed her lorgnette. She was actually breathing aloud in gasps.

“It—can’t be, and yet it may be!” she exclaimed finally. “The lost clue to little Jack’s treasures——”

"A lost clue!" Jane repeated. It was her turn to inspect the beads.

"Such a long and strange story!" panted Mrs. Corday. "But if this should be *it!*"

"What?" asked Gloria, in her direct way.

"The clue to the hiding place. It was a stone, set in a necklace! My dear husband told me almost with his last breath!"

"Did Jack have it?" Gloria asked, deeply perplexed.

"Jack? Why no. It was Jack's loss. She had no reason to hide the clue, but every reason under the sun and earth to hunt for it." The tailor-made suit seemed to strain at the seams. Mrs. Corday sat down, exhausted.

"Where can we go for a few minutes? I must tell you a part of the story privately."

"Come over to the Rookery Tea Room," suggested Gloria, with a drowning girl's clutch at rescue. "There will be no one there at this hour and we can talk comfortably."

As they allowed the station door to shut with a bang, and Gloria beckoned to the patient hack driver, she remembered the distant essay as one remembers the last thought before sleep.

Jane stepped in the car first. Gloria followed,

and Mrs. Corday, still holding the suspected necklace in a firm hand, gave Dave her orders.

Compared with lost treasures and erratic women, what, after all, was a mere prize essay? But Gloria could not crush back her fluttering hopes.

Her dad represented her world, his happiness her one desire, and to do something worth while in her first term was her determination. All this was involved in the prize essay, for in other studies than English, she had found herself unequal to most of her companions. But she loved this subject and it was almost finished, that essay. Still!

Jack lay helpless. She could not do for herself what was asked of Gloria. And she was so keenly sensitive among the over critical girls.

Mrs. Corday was even now betraying signs of some of the peculiarities attributed to her. She was strangely excited over that little string of beads. Perhaps this was the hallucination Jack had spoken of so guardedly?

With a sign of resignation, Gloria pointed out the Rookery Tea Room. Mrs. Corday's eyes appeared to have taken root in the sight of the necklace.



GLORIA WAS VISIBLY EMBARRASSED.

Gloria at Boarding School.

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Spellbound was the only word that seemed to
describe her condition.

Was it real or imagined?
In either case it provided a respite.

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE ROOKERY TEA ROOM

THE tea room was conveniently deserted. Jane smiled gratefully at the plate of doughnuts and the pot of tea, but Mrs. Corday would not be tempted. Gloria could not decide whether the woman was imagining the queer story of a hidden treasure, or whether she might have some reasonable basis for her continued declaration.

"You see, dear," she kept insisting, "Mr. Corday had a bad man in his troupe." (The word troupe surprised Gloria.) "And there was a big diamond from India that this Turk, we called him, knew all about. It was while the wagons were passing from one place to another that the Turk tried to get the gem box. Many a time I saw it, but Philip never let it leave his own care." She sighed and looked off, past the fanciful decorations, hand-made on the walls of the Rookery. Just then, in spite of the artificial blemishes in-

tended for aids, Mrs. Corday looked really attractive. Gloria saw a fading violet tone in the large round eyes, and the features now warped out of their original lines, must have been comely enough a few years earlier. Mrs. Corday had removed the gray gloves and displayed well kept hands—rather too well kept, Gloria reasoned, but as a mounting for so many showy rings, hands would need to be unusual.

"I always hate to talk of this because Jack has begged me to be—careful," continued the woman. "There was a time when the lawyers declared I was crazy, didn't know what I was talking about, and they even went so far as to try to have a guardian appointed for my Jack. Think of it!" Her eyes snapped little flashes and she sat bolt upright as if preparing to strike at an invisible enemy.

Gloria put her hand out instinctively in a caressing way, and Jane once more pressed the comfort of a good cup of tea, upon the narrator.

"Perhaps I do need it," admitted the woman. "I get so worked up when I think of those robbing lawyers."

While a fresh pot of tea was being fetched, Gloria wondered if the fine young man, described

by Trixy as being one of the riders with Jack on the early morning trail, could be one of the robbing kind. Mrs. Corday sipped her tea quite daintily, and beyond the extravagance of her attire and the gushing manner, Gloria could see little to find fault with. But then, Gloria was simple in her own tastes, and as Pat would say she "made generous allowance for every one." It would have been more accurate to say that Gloria merely understood folks better than did the girls bent too closely upon social foibles.

While all this flashed back and forth through Gloria's mind, the time it took was too brief to count. It was very important for her to acquire some correct estimate of the woman before her, to know, if possible whether to oppose or agree with her idea that the necklace might contain some clue to the hidden gems, if such there were, but one consideration was paramount:

Mrs. Corday should not go up to the Hall and argue her way to Jack. That would be too risky. So Gloria labored to detain her.

The woman finished her tea and again took up the story of the gems. Gloria suppressed more than one smile as she recalled her own and Trixy's joke about the Pirate's Daughter, for Jack

was now assuming the fanciful character in reality.

"I know you think this is very queer," said Mrs. Corday, "but you see, show people are always different from other folks."

"Show people!" exclaimed Jane, pressing her napkin to her lips in consternation.

"Why, yes. Didn't you understand that? Mr. Corday was the owner of the Great American Equine Show?" The widow seemed to think this fact should have been known to any intelligent American. She extolled the wonders of the show, declared Mr. Corday was one of the biggest men ever connected with any circus; that his troupes were unique in their captivating attractions, and judging from her elaborate descriptions and her extravagant estimate, this big show must have been the loser in not having had Mrs. Corday for its press manager.

"I had charge of all the wardrobes!" she said proudly, "and I had five other women under me in the women's tent. Such robes! Such costumes and such perfectly magnificent trappings! Why, we had one little woman, her name was Yvette Duval and she rode our whitest Arab steed. Her trappings were really studded with stones, gems

given to her by great foreign potentates that we had performed for."

"Did Jack have any of those things with her at school? I mean at Altmount?" asked Gloria frankly. She was too surprised to be tactful.

"Jack have circus things with her! Why, my dear child, I couldn't use the word in her hearing. She detests it all, although she loved her father dearly, and he perfectly idolized her, yet, you could scarcely get her to come near the grounds. She's so proud and high strung." During all this Mrs. Corday fingered the little necklace, pausing often to scrutinize some newly discovered vein in a stone or color in a bead.

"Then Jack would not have had any spangled nets or beaded things with her?" persisted Gloria, thinking of the trunk as yet unidentified.

"She has one little dark beaded dress I bought for her, myself. A friend brought two over from Paris. Also she has a few neck beads, but that's all," declared the woman earnestly. "No, Jack wouldn't so much as hang upon the wall one of her own dear mother's trophies. You see riders have so many such gifts and sometimes they are so valuable, but Jack could never be brought to admit that her mother rode in a circus, although she

was an artist, if there ever was one and Jack inherited her agility. Poor dear little woman! Her health failed and she went very young." An appropriate pause gave Gloria time to give some little attention to Jane. But Jane was, as ever, too good natured to feel neglected. She nibbled the doughnuts, and seemed to be content just to be near Gloria.

"I couldn't take time to tell you the whole story," Mrs. Corday said next, "but what puzzles me, now that I've got over my surprise far enough to think straight, is, how any one at this out of the way school ever got hold of these beads, if they really are the lost clue. The reason Jack came here was because the Miss Altons knew dear Blanco, she was Jack's own mother, and she always wanted Jack to come here. But you see, travelling all over the country, it was just natural she kept her only child within reach. Jack has had a governess or tutor since she could say her A. B. C's—but I'm afraid she is not overfond of regular school work. There I go, rambling again," laughed the continuous talker. "But I do feel so at home with you both," she beamed. "And if only this is what we have all been searching for!" she held the beads up so that the light

of the table candle developed every little vein or marking in the curious collection.

"Who would know if this really is the clue?" asked Gloria. She had almost lost all doubts and was quite won over to the story. She did remember, however, that deluded persons were often quite wonderful in their powers for deluding others.

"Mr. Gilbert, he's one human lawyer. A young fellow too, very handsome, a friend of Miss Alton's. He made all arrangements for Jack here," explained Mrs. Corday, "and he has seen the necklace with the clue stone in it, for Philip, that's Mr. Corday, told me he, Mr. Gilbert, had all the particulars. But how *could* it get to Altmount?"

"Jack never saw this, so far as I know," Gloria said reflectively. "In fact, I have never had it on before this morning. Isn't that strange?"

"That's the way things happen with you, Glory dear," said Jane proudly. "I've known your father to look for his pen knife for days, and I'd help him too, but you would come along without looking at all and lay your hands right upon it. Don't you believe some folks are naturally lucky?" she asked Mrs. Corday.

Gloria smiled incredulously. She didn't believe

it, that was evident. But she was more mystified than ever about the giver of the necklace and the owner of the trunk, for there was no doubt of it, she who owned the trunk had given the necklace in reward for the finding of the big red stone. And all this had come about from that simple incident of Gloria's first mistake. And even Maggie, the voluble, had innocently contributed, for it was she who found "the bead" and left it carefully upon Gloria's pin tray. But there the mystery stood. Now the great question was:

Who gave Gloria the necklace?

Jack, suspected at first, was, according to Mrs. Corday's story, entirely eliminated. Yet no other girl seemed a plausible possibility. Could Jack have so deceived her stepmother? Would her dislike for the circus lead her to ignore the hidden gems that the old Arab, chief of the troupe, had trailed from his own country?

"That old Turk," said Mrs. Corday, as if she had been following Gloria's thoughts, "made a dash to get the jewel box one night, and only for the quick work of a couple of Jap jugglers he would have got it. That was why Philip hid it, and he covered every trace of the spot so cleverly (he was such a smart man) that it can't be found

except by following the directions given in a paper to Mr. Gilbert, the lawyer. These directions are pointed out by veins in a moss agate, and that agate was put in a necklace for Jack. It disappeared somehow about a year ago, and I've followed up every one who could possibly have come in touch with it. I believe it was shown to one or two of the women, but they were honest as the sun. They never took it intentionally. Yvette Duval was one of them but she died a little later. She had a daughter. That just gives me an idea! You haven't a girl at Altmount named Yvette, have you?"

"No," replied Gloria. "I'm sure we haven't, for I helped one of the teachers make the list for the year book. There wasn't any such name."

"Because her mother's things were taken from the tent when I was attending to my sick husband. I always insist on each article being doubly checked up so that there can be no mistake, but while I was away Stella, my assistant, had the wardrobe in charge. Dear me!" she exclaimed suddenly, "that hack is gone and look at the time!"

She held out her hand and displayed a very pretty wrist watch.

It was almost noon!

With a little gasp Gloria realized that her morning was gone, and with it the prize essay faded further and further away from becoming even a possibility. The young girl in the commercial department who was to type it for her, would probably have given up expecting the "copy," which was to have been handed her in installments during the morning. And this was the very last day! There was no hiding her disappointment, and Jane quickly discerned it.

"What is it, Glory?" she asked. "Missed your classes or something?"

"No, I had a day off without classes," replied Gloria, retrieving her smile. "But I had no idea it was so late. Mrs. Corday has told us such an interesting story——"

"I feel as if I had been shot out of a cannon," declared Mrs. Corday, sending a critical hand over her side hair, then smoothing down the closely fitted lines of her smart coat. "Really, I can't believe I'm awake. First it was the shock of Jack's accident, then the indignation I felt when I believed those old Alton ladies were plotting to keep me from her. You see, I have had so much of that sort of thing from tricky lawyers. But the cap to the climax came when this little trinket

clinked at your feet, Gloria. I love to say the name. It is like a—like a blessing, somehow."

The owner of the name looked like a blessing fulfilled just then, but she was soon forced to spoil the tableau by helping Jane with her bonnet and coat.

Mrs. Corday seemed more agitated than ever. She insisted upon paying the full check and Gloria noticed she left a generous "tip" on the table for the girl in the Priscilla costume. And the natural color surmounting the artificial in her florid face, betrayed a state of keen excitement.

"Now, where's that miserable hack driver?" she complained.

"He'll be along, fast enough," replied Gloria, wondering where they would go this time, and hoping desperately it would not be directly to Altmount.

"There he is," said Jane, for faithful Dave loomed up quickly as the party emerged from the tea room.

"Would you be willing to trust me with this, for a short time?" Mrs. Corday asked Gloria, holding up again the much suspected necklace.

"Why, certainly. Keep it as long as you like.

I only hope it does not disappoint you in the end," said Gloria earnestly.

"Then, I believe I'll go straight back and hunt up Mr. Gilbert. I hate to go without seeing my darling Jack, but if you ever knew how this matter has haunted me! I don't wonder they thought me crazy at times. I dream night after night that Philip is begging me to get the big stone he was so fond of. Because it was Jack's mother's, because it had been given her by some great foreign prince, and because it has some value greater to Jack's family than mere money. You see," she was panting from the long, vehement speech, and she was ready now to get into Dave's long suffering taxi, "you see," she repeated. "I feel the charge was given me and I must fulfill it. If only this——" The beads were now almost reverently dropped into her handsome bag—"is the clue. How shall we ever, ever thank you?" she asked the perplexed girl, whose cheeks burned and eyes fairly stung with suppressed emotion.

"Glory was always lucky," insisted patient, quiet Jane.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SACRIFICE

TRIXY met Glory in the hall. She appeared decidedly glad to do so.

"Where ever have you been, dear?" she demanded. "We looked everywhere for you."

"Why? What was the rush?" smiled Gloria, allowing Trixy and Jane time to exchange greetings. They were well acquainted, both from the year Gloria had spent in Sandford, which was Trixy's home town, and the year before that, at Barbend, Gloria's homestead town.

"At the Rookery!" exclaimed Trixy. "I never dreamed you would be having tea before noon. Jack's lots better. Didn't her mother come?"

"Better? Could she have seen—her—mother?"

"Yes, and she wanted to——"

Gloria's look of distress checked Trixy. They were in the little reception room, and Jane was glancing about her with apparent approval.

But Gloria wilted, and a sudden puckering of her lips threatened to break out in stronger emotion.

"But it's really better for Jack not to have seen her mother," Trixy soothed. "The doctor was here, and whatever he feared seems to have passed over," she explained, trying to infect Gloria with her own smile. "Come on up and show Jane around. I'll carry your bag, Janie," she promptly offered.

"You see," Trixy continued, doing her best to entertain Jane and at the same time to respect Gloria's depression, "this is an off day. Those who aren't finishing essays are working hard on tests. I've just been released."

"And what about Glory? Could she spare all that while? I never did see such a talker as that woman," declared Jane. "And such crazy stories! Though she had a way of makin' you believe her, right enough. Glory dear, you look fagged out. Throw yourself right down on that couch and don't mind Janey. My, what a pretty place you've got! I'm so glad you're real comfy."

Gloria stepped behind the curtain and made signs to Trixy. These interpreted meant "take care of her for a while." Gloria's face pictured

her keen disappointment. Tears were swimming in her eyes, her lips trembled, she was plainly on the verge of a good cry.

"Come along, Janie, and let me show you around," offered Trixy. "We'll leave Glo to straighten up some of her neglected tasks. This is a good time to see our big study hall, and all the sacred nooks——"

"Glory dear, you'll find the lavender in my bag. It always used to help your headaches and I'm afraid you are brewing one," predicted the solicitous Jane. "There now, I'll leave my things here on your bed, and look around with Beatrix. You know I must get a train back——"

"Don't talk of going back," Gloria managed to say. "You've only just got here. Don't forget to show her the picture gallery, Trix," she suggested. "Some of those old ladies may have been neighbors of Jane's." This was intended as a joke but it sounded more like a threat; Gloria's voice was so tragic.

A few minutes later the storm broke. Prone on the bed, a sobbing form bore little resemblance to the usually vivacious Gloria.

"To lose it all for nothing!" she groaned. "Jack didn't even need all my—precious morning."

And I wouldn't dare tell her—about—the necklace."

But the sudden outburst could not be prolonged, for Jane must not see her in this plight. Even the satisfaction of a good cry had to be checked—Gloria got up, somehow, looked in the glass, but saw nothing. Her eyes were still swimming, and how her throat ached!

That essay! Her first real school love! To have worked upon it so long, and then to have met with such a stream of unavoidable interruptions! If it had not been for dad— But what girl does not know the pangs of an unjust disappointment? To have made so useless a sacrifice!

Whether or not the motive was entirely flawless, it must be admitted, that deep down in Gloria's unexplored forces there remained a picture of the country girl at boarding school, where unpleasant little stories had preceded her. True, she was almost an orphan, whereas, the high holding cousin Hazel had both parents, and many opportunities of knowing such trifling mannerisms as are supposed to be stamped on a girl with "finish," but Gloria had had the big world of outdoors, with the sea for a background and

the hills for variety, and she was far too clever to under value the knowledge of her own world in such a chance as the prize essay afforded.

She wanted to show the girls!

And she wanted to delight her dad!

The drudgery of actually putting the proof upon paper in a simple direct way, carefully worded and carefully spelled, (she had looked up scores of words,) had proven greater than she had expected it would be, but the task inspired interest as it grew, and now Gloria actually loved the sketch, as she would have loved a journal of her happiest days. But it would be impossible for her to finish the essay in the short time left. The "commercial girls" were not boarders, and they all completed their work before noon. Somehow Gloria now felt as if she were wrapped in a cloud of crepe, black and smothering. Even Jane's long looked for visit was completely spoiled.

One or two spasms of rebellion finished the attack of self pity. Then Gloria jerked herself up like a colt at the twinge of a smarting bite.

"All right," she said to the image now scoffing at her from the mirror, "I guess I'll live through it. After all, it was only a chance. The un-

finished sheets of paper would catch her eye although she was avoiding their corner. It had been foolish to count so much on a mere chance, she argued persistently.

But all this was not really why she was feeling the disappointment so keenly. It was because Gloria instinctively tried her best to win in any wholesome sport, and wasn't it real sport to enter a contest with girls from so many schools? To make use of a chance to express her own original views on disputed theories?

Then, there was always her father, and his natural pride in her work. And all future chances to do anything really worth while seemed so very remote.

But Jack was better, she kept telling herself guiltily, for the news brought her only a meager satisfaction. Why couldn't the old doctor have known? And why couldn't old Alty have gone to the station herself and attended to her own unpleasant business? Because the need was so slight and the loss seemed truly crushing.

Trixie and Jane were coming back. She heard their voices, and made a brave effort to look like herself for Jane's sake. Deliberately she gathered the unfinished essay and thrust it under

the table cover. That would be the end of it. There was no possibility of any time extension, and Gloria was too big to believe in fairies.

"A lovely place, dear." Jane expressed the opinion as she entered. "And I'm sure you'll do very fine work here. Have you written any more stories?"

"Oh, stories, Jane dear," deprecated Gloria, "those were silly dreams, that I used to write when at home. School work is much more practical. Sit down here near me and let's talk." She drew the dear old nurse down beside her on the couch. "Jane, honey, Trixy does all she can for me, but I do so miss you when—I get in trouble," she snuggled gratefully.

"So that's it, honey. You're in trouble. Tell Janie all about it. Is the string of beads in it too?"

"Somewhat," admitted Gloria. "But first we must tell Trixy all about it. You see, she's a partner in that little mixup."

"But your face is all—is it chapped from the wind?" Jane asked. The outburst had left tell-tale marks after all.

"Rough treatment," laughed Gloria, relinquish-

ing her affectionate hold on Jane long enough to dab a little alleviative powder on the shiniest spots. "Have a chair close by, Trixy," she offered presently, "and listen to the story of the lost jools. I told you that string of beads was hoodooed. It was."

Trixie listened, more surprised at each startling statement, and as Gloria related the happenings of the morning, telling of Mrs. Corday's positive declarations, that gems really had been hidden to frustrate an Arab's attempt to obtain them, she, herself, felt the tale grew more remarkable with the re-telling.

"A circus!" exclaimed Trixy. "We suspected that from the first, didn't we, Glo? But how ever did Jack, dear as she is, get in here with circus parents?"

"All explained satisfactorily," replied Gloria. "But we can't cover every detail now. Jane will be dreaming of pirate's caves and gorgeously dressed ladies. Trix, you should have seen the much maligned Steppy. Why, she's a real model for the stylish-stout. Splendid clothes, and such a lot of them, rather high colored hair and complexion, but well done, I should say, though I'm

no judge of the art. And so far as I could discover, I found little trace of the carping, grating-voiced female the girls all barked about. She did get excited once or twice, when I spoke of Alty; but it seems she has a grudge against the authorities here. Thinks they're in league with some lawyers to get Jack away from her." Gloria paused and Trixy expressed her own opinion. It included opposition to that of the other girls.

"I can just imagine how Mrs. Corday feels," Gloria continued. "She has not had all the opportunities of so called culture, but think what she knows about real business."

"That's it, Glory," remarked Jane. "Books and school houses give you a good start but you've got to finish the race yourself. And there's them that wins who never had much of a start."

"Of course," Gloria reasoned, "she may be erratic. Didn't you notice how her eyes flashed and how she kept fumbling with the beads, Janie?"

"Not overly. If, as she said, she's been a-lookin' for that necklace so long and she fell across it heels over head, you might say, no warnin' nor suspicion, don't you think she ought to be upset when the beads dropped right off a

strange girl's neck, at her own feet on a deppo floor?"

The girls both agreed with Jane. Then Gloria recalled another "high spot" in the morning's experience.

"One thing I thought queer," she said, "was how the clue could have been lost when it was held to be so precious. Mrs. Corday explained it by saying that her husband was taken so suddenly ill he had not time to put the necklace into his lawyer's hands as he had intended to. She, Mrs. Corday, never saw it, because it was delivered at the grounds by the maker, just when she was obliged to leave and care for her sick husband."

"But who would receive and sign for such a valuable thing?" asked Trixy.

"Mrs. Corday's assistant," she said. "I forget what she called her. Was it Stella, Janie?"

"Yes, I think that was it. I was so interested. My word, Beatrix, it was better than a play to listen to. The way that woman can act, with her face and hands."

"Exactly," laughed Gloria. "She acted with her face and hands. But, Trix, she made one more interesting point. She asked me if we ever had a girl here named Yvette Duval. It seems

one of the confidential and highly prized members of the flying horse squad bore that name. She died and left a young daughter. While Mrs. Corday was nursing her sick husband Mrs. Duval's belongings were sent for. She didn't say how old the daughter was who was in school somewhere, but I suppose she might be about like us. "Trix," exclaimed Gloria, suddenly, "if Jack doesn't know anything about the necklace and didn't give it to us——"

"To you——"

"Well, to me, who did? Is the missing Yvette really here, and did she pick up the necklace in her mother's things by mistake?"

"Yvette," repeated Trixy. "No one here with so fancy a name. The best we can do is Bobbie, Jack, Pat, and plain every day Mary," she recounted.

"But I didn't steal the necklace although I almost stole a trunk," declared Gloria. "Don't forget that the trunk started all this."

"I'm not," assented Trixy.

"Was that a knock?" asked Jane, as a tap interrupted them.

"Miss Alton would like to speak to Miss Doane

in the office," chanted Maggie through a crack in the door.

"Oh," sighed Gloria. "All right," she amended, and the mystery of the trunk, necklace, and hidden gems was, for the time, dismissed.

CHAPTER XVIII

SAY IT WITH POPCORN

MISS SANDERS, the English teacher, was amazed when she found Gloria's essay had not been turned in for the final reading. That was why Miss Alton sent Maggie with the summons.

"But why didn't you tell me?" queried the principal. "I would not have allowed anything to interfere with such important work. You must know we are each pledged to support the honor and traditions of Altmount."

Each word was crushing Gloria's already abused feelings. She had checked her good cry but had not appeased the disturbance which caused it, and again her lip was trembling. Couldn't Miss Alton understand? Were the so-called honor and traditions of Altmount higher than the honor to a friend, and a sick friend at that? And was there any one else who could have shared Jack's confidence as she, Gloria, had been forced to do?

"But I can try some other time, Miss Alton," she said as bravely as she could. "It really—doesn't matter."

"You are noble to say so," accorded Miss Alton. "But it certainly is too bad. Miss Sanders speaks so highly of your original English work. Is there no way you can finish it? If it is only typing I'll call in one of the commercial department girls and have that done. I'll even delay the mail packet——"

"I'm afraid I could hardly finish it satisfactorily now," interrupted Gloria. "You see, I'm—a little——"

She could not finish the sentence. One big tear splashed on her cheek and another promptly followed on the other. Miss Alton knew how much agitation was necessary to arouse girls of Gloria's type to tears, but she also knew how difficult it was to quell such when once they were aroused.

So she patted the shaking shoulders and advised a good lunch.

"You see, we are having quite a run of complications," said the principal, hoping to divert Gloria. "Our nurse has been called to an urgent case, and I can't see what I will do for some one to take charge of Jacquinot. It is out of the

question for our teachers to be disturbed at night."

Gloria's mind did not shift promptly to the new subject, but, at any rate, she was not open for any more public engagements. Even Jack would have to be cared for independently now.

"I hope your friend, Miss Morgan, is having a pleasant day. Would you care to have her stay over night?" asked Miss Alton, next.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that," Gloria brightened. "The day has been—so confusing, I'd love to have dear Jane make a little visit. And oh, Miss Alton," (she was all Gloria now,) "I do believe she would be glad to take care of Jack. She's a wonderful nurse and just hates not to be useful."

"Really, could she?"

"I don't see why not?" New interest chased the shadows.

"Why, you dear girl, it does seem you are the very soul of resourcefulness. If she would just be within call during the night. But are you sure she wouldn't think we were imposing?"

"Jane knows, she never guesses," replied Gloria, smiling away any mistaken inference. "And please, Miss Alton, don't mind about the essay. Jane would say one sacrifice brings two

rewards. That's her cheerful logic, and I've been brought up on it. So, after all, perhaps there is some—reward just lurking in the background." The speech was unlike Gloria's. She never affected the "smiling through" attitude, unless she was on her way "through," and couldn't turn back, but now she felt the necessity of assuming a tone of true politeness. Miss Alton was really contrite for having delayed the essay work, and again tried to discover a way to make up for it, but it was obviously impossible.

"Then let me tell you, my dear," said the woman accepting the conclusion, "that I understand and appreciate your heroism, and whether there is or not a reward in the background, as you say, you may always remember, that your first real loss at boarding school entailed a noble sacrifice. Quietly and even without there being a possibility of applause from the girls, as was the case in the rescue from the lake, you have given up a chance to win real distinction, for this competition is, as you know, a notable event. But you have let it go by for the sake of helping poor little Jack. Even she will not know what you have given up, but your own heart and your own conscience will be immeasurably benefited. I know

this sounds like a Friday morning lecture," the principal smiled as she remarked, "but——" Suddenly the "lecture" was concluded, silently with a loving arm crushing affection upon Gloria's unsteady shoulder while Jane's promised reward, in the shape of happy satisfaction, broke through the shadows.

"Thank you, Miss Alton," murmured Gloria. "It has been worth while."

"And about Miss Morgan, your devoted Jane," Miss Alton changed her tone to suit the happier prospect. "Would you really like to ask her to stay over?"

"I should love to."

"Then do, my dear. It will be such a help if she consents to do so, for Jack needs little attentions, and will need them for several days. She barely escaped pneumonia. What a blessing you found her when you did. You are having a rather eventful career for a first year girl," she added, "but perhaps you have guessed that even Altmount has been more generous in admitting pupils since our many war lessons have liberated us socially. We have with us now girls who have longed for just the chance we are giving them. They have always had means but——"

She paused and smiled, Gloria thought, like a picture of the modern mother, for Miss Alton was a fine looking woman, and her simplicity of style more directly marked her personal distinction.

What girls besides Jack, Gloria wondered, could be among those referred to as coming under the extended social scale? Some one else must be in the school, was she "In Cog"? Some one other than Jack must have owned the trunk, the lost and found red stones and the necklace. But who could that be?

"I'll run right back and ask Jane about staying," Gloria said, this new thought almost banishing the essay's disappointment. "It would seem so like home to have Jane near," she added. "You know, Miss Alton, she is really my near-mother," and there was no pretense in Gloria's sincerity.

Imagine Jane, the demure, installed in Jack's room, garbed in a great, white over-all apron, and armed with authority equal to that of any professional nurse!

She was delighted to stay, her one germ of unhappiness resulted from an enforced idleness, for since Gloria's home had been disrupted, by Mr. Doane's foreign commission and Gloria's board-

ing school plans, Jane Morgan found little to do that really satisfied her natural energy.. She had visited her sister's home, did all she could to mend, patch and darn for the children there, but the confusion was so different from the quietude of Gloria's home, that she soon found it disquieting.

"And she adores nursing," Gloria told Trixy. "Don't you remember how she took charge when Aunt Harriet was sick?"

"And don't you remember how she took charge when Marty's mother was sick? The time you and I became Red Cross nurses and used our best car for an ambulance?"

This recalled an interesting incident of the previous year and both girls now chatted and laughed merrily over the recollection.

"There goes the mail bag," said Trixy innocently, when it was almost evening and the eventful day was nearing a close.

"Yes, with the—essays," said Gloria, her eyes following Sam's car as he rattled along down the roadway.

"Oh, Glo dear. I didn't mean—" Trixy's voice was contrite.

"It's perfectly all right, Trix," declared Gloria brushing a speck from the window before her. "You couldn't hurt my feelings about that old essay if you hit me on the head with the—bloated mail bag. I don't mind it a bit. I'm cured, absolutely. And Miss Alton said a lot of nice things——"

"I should think she well might."

"She did. And I guess the dear old dad would heartily approve if he knew—all the circumstances."

"If it takes me a week to write it, I'll make it my special business to see that he *does* know all the circumstances." Trixy was very pretty in her indignation.

"Well, anyhow I've got Jane, perhaps for days," reasoned Gloria. "Do you suppose, Trix, that Miss Alton did that just to be nice?"

"I do not. I know she did it to be nice to Jack, and to her overworked, frail and otherwise feeble assistants. Did you ever see any one wilt like little Whisper Taylor after an indifferent night?"

"She did look peaked. How do you like Jane on the staff?"

"She's worth a dozen mere intellectuals," de-

clared Trixy. "But, Glo, what are we going to do about the Pirate's Daughter? It's like a game of hide-and-seek."

"Just wait. Wait and she'll betray herself, for she is around here some place and she isn't Jack, that's certain."

"Nor Pat, nor Jean, nor——"

"No use guessing. I'm gray haired internally trying to guess. But, Trixy, has it occurred to you that the trail of the necklace is rather—spoofy? How could any one trace a lost article, supposed to be hidden in the mountains by means of a stupid string of beads?"

"It is queer. Maybe, after all, Glo, we've been fooled. Perhaps Mrs. Corday really isn't responsible."

"Well, if she isn't, I'm sorry for her, of course," said Gloria, "but I was so glad to have her grab the beads and run for that train——"

"That you don't care whether she unearths a pirate's cave or not."

"No."

"I don't blame you. To listen to all that wild story in the Rookery while——"

"Hush, love! The mail bag's gone." A fanci-

ful little step described as a "gambol" corroborated Gloria's determined good humor. The essay episode was positively closed.

"What did Jack say about not seeing her mother?" Trixy presently asked. "You were privileged to talk with her, I noticed. That comes of having a Nurse Jane."

"I believe, Trix," confided Gloria, "that Jack heard somehow about my—blighted hope. She must have felt herself to blame about this morning's work, and that was why she changed her mind about seeing the Steppy. I had a hard time trying to make her feel all right about it. She only abandoned the essay idea herself last night. But as a matter of fact, Trix, I had a wonderful time at the Rookery! You should have seen the elegant Mrs. Corday!"

"Another special privilege of yours. I'm sure she was as good as a musical comedy."

"Better, and no offense intended either," declared Gloria. "Well, since the show is over, let's go hunt up a couple of real girls. I am just dying to hear Pat splutter——"

But they found, on the door of Pat's room, a sign worded:

GONE FOR THE AFTERNOON. CALL AT
THE KITCHEN.

"The kitchen," repeated Trixy.

"You started that fad," Gloria reminded her. "It's rather a cold day. Maybe they're making—soup."

"It wouldn't be so bad, although I would prefer hot chocolate. However, let's find out," moved Trixy.

Since permission had been given to use the kitchen occasionally, a new set of rules was promulgated. This, among items, included the following:

"No splattering allowed on range," also, "All utensils must be thoroughly cleaned and put away in an orderly manner. The floor must be carefully brushed, towels or cloths rinsed and dish mops placed in the sunniest window." But none of this deterred the girls from having jolly times in the big, bright room, among shining pans and mysterious tools, queer looking utensils and assorted aluminums, although none were to be even handled without special permission of the staff of the culinary department.

"I smell it!" announced Glory, en route. "It's pop corn!"

"Without doubt," agreed Trixy. "Are we invited?"

"I hear Pat's voice, so we are. I'll also offer to pay for the corn. I just have got to do something rash to wind up this perfect day," set forth Gloria.

A hail greeted the entrants to the kitchen.

"Say it with pop corn! We're on the last round!" shouted Pat, "and Maud's ahead. Listen to her popper! It's a regular gattling gun. If they only knew about that when war was on! Come over here, Glo dear, and sitteth beside me. I'm grinding out the record with this yar egg beater——"

A volley from the egg beater announced the contest closed, with Maud Hunter's popper full white puffs "without any, or at least without many, blanks," while her opponent, Margie Baker, blamed bad corn and an uncertain fire for her failure to score.

"But it's all first rate," declared the official taster, Georgia Graham, trying to sprinkle salt over the big yellow bowl of pop corn and pour butter upon it, simultaneously.

"It's the Dove's treat," Pat explained. "We're

all through for the day and, my word! But we are tired! Those who haven't been essaying have been cramming—— How's Jack?"

Trixie and Gloria gratefully took places on the stationary wash tubs and received their share of pop corn on nice, clean enamel pie tins. Such a treat could only be enjoyed in a school like Altmount, small enough and large enough for the necessary social conditions. Twenty girls were crowded into the kitchen, with the understanding that all would be out, and that they would leave things "just as they had found them," before five o'clock.

Until that time the pop corn squad did full justice to the confidence reposed in them, and as Pat put it "a pleasant time was had by all," although Margie choked on a blank, and Isobel fell off the step ladder, and Louise nearly flooded the place by turning on the hot water faucet and losing the trail in a whirl-wind of steam.

Otherwise there were no accidents.

Neither were there any appetites for dinner that evening, among the reckless Doves.

CHAPTER XIX

GEMS AND MOSS AGATE

A WEEK passed rather tranquilly, with Jane still presiding over Jack's room and Gloria still wondering what would happen when Mrs. Corday would come back from her treasure quest.

No mention of the necklace episode had been made to Jack, who was now progressing very favorably, and also getting gayer every day, according to Pat, and prettier every day according to Gloria.

"There's nothing like idleness to really make a girl look handsome," Gloria insisted absurdly, "caps and cushions are so wonderfully becoming."

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Trixy. "You look all right in a smock and standing."

"Thanks, but I've done my share. You may don the smock, and here's the duster." Trixy caught it on the way to her eye. "This is the psychological moment for me to read dad's letter

over. I want to see what he says about Honolulu brides."

"They're hideous. Just consult your geographical," commented Trixy. "Besides, I didn't invite the girls in here to kick up all this dust. It was your party." But she continued to flutter the duster around indifferently, and once caught the alarm clock before it smashed its face desperately upon the hearth. "I may re-read a letter myself. Mother expects us both for Thanksgiving, you know," set forth Beatrix Travers.

"I'd just love to accept, Trix. Everybody seems to be going some place, although we are only to have a week-end. Jane may adopt Jack or Jack adopt Jane, the way things look now. I never guessed I was putting my own poor nose out of joint when I lent Jane out. I didn't tell you, Trix, I'm just doing it now. Miss Alton has written an elaborate letter to my dad, saying a lot of foolish things about me. You see, she wants to make amends for my lost essay prize. Not that I had really caught the gay plunger—"

"I'm glad she wrote. It saves me a heap of trouble," put in Trixy. "It's one thing to lose,

out fair and square, but quite another to be blocked. You wait and see if Alty and Ray Sanders do not contrive to run a little contest all their own. Then, you may drag out those poor crumpled little sheets of paper that are smothering under the table cover."

"I won't. I never want to hear of a contest again. Besides, just see what a lot of fun we have had on the mystery story," reasoned Gloria.

"I just wonder——" Trixy said seriously, "where Mary Mears will go for Thanksgiving. She's so alone——"

"Mary's a queer duck," interrupted Gloria. "I'm sure she's trying to avoid me for some reason. Every time I almost meet her she detours."

"Can any one have hurt her feelings? She actually walked past me in the lecture room this morning without lifting her eyes. Of course, she saw me; I wonder——"

"And she hasn't been near Jack since that first wild night. Do you know, Trix, even Sam remarks upon her moods! He declared she has something on her mind, which is worse than it sounds, from Sam."

"Yes, she is plainly discontented. Yet most

girls are, during the first half year. That's why all the queer things happen in that brief period," said Trixy, trying the wrong side of the couch cover for a change and getting enough of the change in the actual process. "Yes, Glo dear, we may be prepared for a real slump—after Thanksgiving. I'm told the girls all settle down to the quiet life and depend upon hikes and the gym for excitement."

"I won't mind," replied Gloria. "The little mystery trunk and the hoodooed necklace are quite enough for my first year. I hope it is finally cleared up before the so-called holiday."

"It will be. Didn't you know Jack really does expect a visit from Steppy?"

"No! When?"

"She didn't say. Just mentioned it casually."

"Trix, do you think we should have told Jack anything? Prepared her, I mean?"

"Land sakes, no! Let the climax take care of itself," moaned Trixy.

Which was really all the preparation either of the girls had for the same climax which came upon them three days later, just when the programme was being checked off for the Thanksgiving weekend.

"She's come!" breathed Gloria, and Trixy knew she meant—Jack's Steppy. A premonitory fluttering betrayed Gloria's high hopes.

"Yes, I know," admitted Trixy, "and Jack just sent Pat down to ask us in. Poor Pat looked left out."

In Jack's room they encountered the full blown Steppy, garbed, this time, in chrysanthemum golden brown, with a glorious plumy hat caressing her faithful sunset, golden hair. Her smile might also be termed golden, for it lighted up her big shadowy eyes, and flashed through every hidden line of her determined face.

She laughed outright as the girls greeted her, after Trixy's brief introduction. The burst of emotions was more graphic than words could have been. It was dramatically with a touch of comic:

"The mystery is solved!"

"Sit down and gasp in comfort," invited Jack. She was beaming happily.

"We got it," announced Mrs. Corday briefly. "The little moss agate was in the necklace, and it led us right to the secret box."

"How?" asked Gloria, eagerly.

From the beaded bag Mrs. Corday drew out

the necklace. She laid it carefully upon Jack's small table.

"See this stone?" she indicated. "That's the agate, just as I suspected. The clue was made by my dear husband from this queer, innocent, little stone. The directions were in his lawyer's keeping, safe with our friend, Mr. Gilbert, the only honest lawyer I ever knew."

All three girls were gazing, fascinated, at the little talisman.

"But how could this——"

"It is strange," the woman interrupted Gloria's query. "But like everything else, simple when you understand. Here is the paper," she raised her voice to a tone of importance and sort of chanted from the typewritten slip:

"With base of moss at north, follow left limb to the hickory." She paused dramatically. "As plain as the nose on your face," she said.

"With base of moss at north?" repeated Gloria, puzzled rather than enlightened.

"Yes. You see the moss agate has a tree veined through it, Mr. Gilbert pointed it all out to me," admitted Mrs. Corday. "You only have to lay this down just as it would hang on your neck.

Then, see this line? That's the left limb; you just follow that limb straight and you will find, as we did, it points to a certain big hickory tree. Under that tree the box was buried——”

“But how could you dig in this frozen weather?” demanded incredulous Jack.

“Where there's a will you can always find out how,” replied Mrs. Corday. “We simply built a little fire on the spot and the ground seemed glad of the heat, for it turned over quite agreeably, and we didn't have to dig down very deep either. And now, Jacky, who says I'm crazy!” she demanded, fairly exhaling her prideful exultation.

“No one but ‘money grabbers’ ever did,” declared Jack. “They simply wanted the commission on handing out my prize packages,” she smiled, putting an arm affectionately through the golden brown elbow. “But tell the girls all of it. You haven't said what you dug up.”

“That's the way I go. Always so easily excited. Well, you see, my dear,” she turned to Gloria, “the hidden gem is a rare one, indeed. It was in a sealed box, just as dear Philip said, and it is called a Golconda diamond from the place in India where it was discovered. The cuttings—

it has forty-eight small facets all pointed together in the one great diamond!" Her description was a queer mixture of the technical and the possible, but there was no mistaking her claims for a most wonderful diamond, unearthed from the roots of the protecting "hickory" and traced through the almost invisible "left limb" of the moss agate with "the base of moss at the north." The woman was too agitated to continue at once. Trixy filled the gap.

"What ever will you do with it, Jack?" she asked.

"Give it to a museum," promptly replied Jack. "It has already given me enough trouble, and I wouldn't fancy it as a keepsake even for all it means—to me," she uttered the last clause reverently.

"You see," again spoke friend Steppy, "the old Turk or whatever he was, followed that diamond until Philip just had to bury it because we were so far out in the mountains and he couldn't get it to safekeeping quickly enough——"

"I guess poor dad felt his illness was becoming serious," broke in Jack gently.

"Indeed he did, my dear. No one knows that

as well as I do. And he was so anxious about that stone! No wonder I acted like a crazy woman trying to find it," she sighed.

"Take your hat off, Steppy," suggested Jack, offering to assist her with the task. "We have all been too excited to think of your comfort."

"Never mind hats," replied the woman, probing for the pins and promptly setting the big plumed headpiece upon the table like a decoration. "But what I would like to know is, how this little lady got hold of the necklace?" She looked quizzically at Gloria. "Who gave it to you?" she asked earnestly.

"I don't know," replied Gloria simply. "It was left on my dresser anonymously."

At that moment a figure appeared, gliding its way from the screen that hid the doorway.

"Mary!" exclaimed blended voices.

"Yes," said Mary Mears. "I have come to confess my part in the curious plot."

Statuesque she stood before them, her ever pale face unlighted by a hint of a smile, and her shadowy eyes like wells too deep for star gleams.

"Mary!" gasped Mrs. Corday, incredulously.

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"Yes, our friend, Mary Mears," said Trixy easily. "Come sit down, Mary," she continued. "We are just having a little clearing up party."

But Mary, tragically, remained standing.



JIM SAID AN OLD INDIAN THREATENED TO MURDER HIM
FOR THE "BEADS."

Gloria at Boarding School.

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CHAPTER XX

THE LURE OF BOARDING SCHOOL

"AND they called you Mary Mears?" repeated Mrs. Corday, with evident recognition of the girl standing there.

"Yes. Dear mother said I might choose a name; she had chosen hers," said Mary faintly.

"That was like her—the dear woman. She was so loving, so gentle," Mrs. Corday's blonde head rested upon the capable hands, the same hands that for years had guided the destiny of marvellous wardrobes for the women riders of Corday's Equine Troupe. Mrs. Corday was plainly overcome. "And," she continued presently, "there was not in our troupe, ever, a woman who could ride like Yvette Duval."

"Your mother? I often heard dad——"

"Yes, my mother," said Mary. "But I was ashamed of the circus!"

"Circus!" echoed Mrs. Corday. "Our troupe

was no circus. It was as high class and as sporty as any first class society horse show ever held!"

Every one laughed; Mary actually smiled.

"And I did so long to be well bred and like other girls," she murmured. "I thought, really, that boarding school——"

"Turned the trick," chirped Gloria, determined to brighten up the atmosphere. "Well, look at me——"

"And I felt the same way," admitted Jack. "I just had an idea all I had to do was to drop in here and—mock the mighty." She glanced at Trixy with unfeigned envy.

"Yes," Mary went on, like one determined to have the worst over, "my one idea was to get to a fashionable school and forget—the circus. I had to bring Yvette's things with me, I had no time to place them in safety. I put them in a trunk hastily——"

"It was your trunk I opened by mistake!" exclaimed Gloria.

"Yes. And it was my mother's precious blood-stone that you returned some time later."

"It had fallen from the trunk. I just found it——"

"I knew or guessed," said Mary. "But when

I thought to give you a little keepsake——”
“The runaway necklace!” broke in Jack.

“Yes,” again admitted Mary. “But I didn’t know——”

“Where and how did you ever get it?” asked Mrs. Corday.

“I went to get Yvette’s things,” (the girls noticed how she used the name instead of “mother,”) “and everything there was in confusion. The attendants said the manager was very ill.”

“He was,” said the widow, solemnly.

“And it was difficult for me to know just what was—my mother’s,” continued Mary. “But she had been so proud of her trophies and wanted me to have every one of them. Her trunk was easy enough to identify but there were some things in the safe.”

“We always kept the valuables locked in the safe,” explained Mrs. Corday.

“Finally, I had everything checked up, and was ready to leave when a queer old man rushed up to me and begged me to take the string of dark beads.”

“An old man? What did they call him?” asked the woman excitedly.

"Jim, I think. He acted queerly and I thought him—sort of crazy!"

"Jim! Poor old Jim! And he got hold of that precious clue," murmured Mrs. Corday. "We never thought of asking Jim. He was only a groom, but as devoted to Mr. Corday as a big dog——"

"He just begged me to take the beads, he called them," continued Mary. "He said an old Indian threatened to murder him for them!"

"There! You see! That was the Turk!" As the Steppy grew more excited Jack made sure the door was tightly closed. Also she put a reminding hand on the nervously tapping finger tips. "I know, dear," agreed the woman. "But you can't blame me——"

"I don't."

Gloria thought she caught a flush of guilt cross Jack's face as she now looked into her stepmother's face. "Like Mary," Jack added, "I have been foolishly ashamed of the circus."

"Well, if you ever knew what your father's horses were worth! Why, you dear little idiot, what do you suppose has made you rich?" asked the vehement Steppy.

"I'd just hate to know," parried Jack.

"Well, you were saying, dear," to Mary, "about poor old Jim?" Mrs. Corday was not to be denied the story.

"I took the beads to please him. I had no idea they were of any account. When I reached our home darling mother was—going——"

"And what was the pretty little name she used to call you?" broke in the woman with kind intentions. "Something like Rosette?"

"Miette," said Mary. "It means little or crumb in French and is a sort of pet name for Mary."

"I remember now. I saw you occasionally," said the veteran.

"Yes, and when I knew you were coming to see Jack, I actually ran off to avoid you, I was so afraid of being known as a circus girl," admitted Mary a little ironically.

"And you were foolish enough to hide all that interesting history because you thought all boarding school girls silly!" charged Gloria. Her admiration for Mary was at last free to assert itself.

"You cured me!" Mary said, now beaming upon the younger girl. "When you brought Jane here and installed her as head nurse——"

"She cured *me* in more ways than one," added Jack slyly. "No one in all of Altmount could possibly have been as silly as—Jacquinot Corday!"

"Where *is* your dear Jane?" asked Steppy, glancing about like one waking from a dream.

"Packing," said Trixy. "We're all going to Thanksgiving at our house——"

"Oh, I counted on a party," wailed Jack. "Mary, you are almost related to me now. Don't you want to see the finest little horse in all the world?"

"And my own horse must be very lonely——"

"There! You see!" charged the one woman present. "And these two girls—hate circus horses!"

"I don't," spoke up Gloria. "I love all kinds, but I simply adore the big white ones that canter through the ring and wait for the fluffy ladies to land on their lovely, broad backs. And just imagine you two girls knowing all about such things and never as much as confiding in me, or in Trixy, or in jolly Pat!"

Mary and Jack stood off a little, their arms intertwined.

"Now you know the horrible truth," said Jack. "That's why I love to walk the gym ceiling and to

fall dead in silly little canoes, Glo, we haven't forgotten about that, you know. And we are going to give you a real necklace to remember us by," she said slyly.

"I love dark gray mossy beads," insisted Gloria, so they both agreed to compromise.

"Now, girls," interrupted the momentarily quieted Steppy. "I must go down to the office and talk things over with those teachers. I hope they won't think I'm going to be bossed this time. I'm counting on a big party for you, Jack. Just get a pad and pencil and scribble off a list."

"And she's the girl you call Steppy!" accused Gloria, when the door bang died out. "You don't know a real lady when you meet her," she smiled at Jack. "Be sure to include Jean and the rebels in your list. What a lark to see their eyes open!"

"You're a dear, Glo," said Mary, and all present smiled unanimously.

.

Just as Trixy predicted, everything happened in the early year, after that the students of Altmount settled down to hard study and plenty of it. The two mysterious girls Jack and Mary, became, naturally, among the most sought after, suspicions

and doubts were cleared away, even Jean and her contingent falling in with the tide of popularity. For the world of girls moves around the joy of good fellowship, and Gloria Doane had a way of cranking up the motor.

THE END

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